A Theory of Intellectual Expertise

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A Theory of Intellectual Expertise

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by

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I, Rocky Webb, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Rocky Webb.
Abstract

Experts pervade public life. We live in an expertise saturated society. Experts are turned to in order to solve problems, justify positions, and are thought to progress our thinking and technology. But what makes an expert an expert? In answering this question, we may want a theory that characterises expertise across the ages, from ancient Greece through to modernity.

I argue for a controversial position: namely that knowledge, by which I mean justified true belief, is not a sensible prerequisite for qualification as an intellectual expert. Intellectual experts from as far back as Aristotle through to Newton have held many false positions. If the past is anything to go by, it may be sensible to question how much knowledge intellectual expertise presupposes.

As an alternative to knowledge, I argue that intellectual expertise can be understood as a matter of possessing a sufficient quantity of epistemically rational beliefs. We can understand intellectual expertise forgoing truth altogether.

In part 1 of my thesis, I focus on building a robust theory of intellectual expertise. It is designed to deal with both epistemically impoverished and epistemically prosperous situations alike. In part 2 of my thesis, I highlight some implications of my theory of intellectual expertise. These include implications for our understanding of moral expertise, intellectual trust, and the relationship between intellectual experts and democracy. As such, my theory of intellectual expertise is a thesis in the domain of social epistemology.
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Introduction

This is a thesis in the domain of social epistemology. The term ‘social epistemology’ refers to a particular set of topics falling within the domain of general epistemology. The topics falling within the domain of social epistemology often have a particular social aspect or focus. The topics of social epistemology include but are not limited to: “testimony, peer disagreement, epistemic relativism, epistemic approaches to democracy, evidence in the law, the epistemology of mass collaboration, and judgement aggregation”.¹ The first task of this introduction is to explore whether social epistemology can be properly distinguished from traditional epistemology. I argue that we should understand the relationship between social epistemology and traditional epistemology in the same way we understand the relationship between political philosophy and philosophy generally: insofar as political philosophy is distinct from philosophy, social epistemology is distinct from traditional epistemology. The second task is to introduce my theory of intellectual expertise: I do this by offering a synopsis of the theory which demonstrates its rightful categorisation in the domain of social epistemology.

0.1) Social Epistemology

One feature that allows us to distinguish between political philosophy and philosophy generally is that political philosophy focuses on specific philosophical questions with a political edge or aspect. By contrast, general philosophy goes

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beyond political philosophy. However, general philosophy is the larger domain of which political philosophy is a part. As such, general philosophy encompasses the questions of political philosophy.

This understanding allows us to explain the relationship between social epistemology and traditional epistemology. Social epistemology can be distinguished from traditional epistemology through noting that social epistemology focuses on epistemological questions which have a social aspect or edge. The questions in social epistemology simultaneously concern both knowing and others. In this vein, a growing body of work falling within the domain of social epistemology is a natural development of an increasingly connected and globalised world.²

In a globalised world, epistemological problems are not deeper or more difficult than they have ever been, but their existence as problems is highlighted: when intellectual labour is divided and subdivided time and again, and where projects are increasingly multidisciplinary, questions involving what others know, intellectual trust, authority and testimony leap to the foreground.

But is an ‘aspect’ or ‘edge’ to the subject matters of social epistemology enough to legitimise it as a domain in its own right? The concern is that social epistemology is not fundamentally different from traditional epistemology. This may cause some to question the legitimacy of social epistemology as a domain in its own right. Social epistemology is just not different enough to strike out on its own:

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² This however is not to suggest that it is only in recent years that knowledge and knowledge production has become a social enterprise. The social character of knowledge seems to be a perennial feature. What has changed over the course of centuries is the degree of interconnectedness between people and the division intellectual labour. Both of these have greatly increased.
after all, it is just traditional epistemology with a focus on others. Ironically the counterclaim can also be fired from the same evidence: social epistemology is what we have always been doing. The thought here is that social epistemology is not new, and that it is no different to traditional epistemology; this is because traditional epistemology falls into the category of social epistemology. Take for instance Lackey’s position concerning the source of the majority of our knowledge:

Virtually everything we know depends in some way or other on the testimony of others—what we eat, how things work, where we go, even who we are. We do not, after all, perceive firsthand the preparation of the ingredients in many of our meals, or the construction of the devices we use to get around the world, or the layout of our planet, or our own births and familial histories. These are all things we are told. Indeed, subtracting from our lives the information we possess via testimony leaves them barely recognizable. Scientific discoveries, battles won and lost, geographical developments, customs, traditions of distant lands—all of these facts would be completely lost to us. It is, therefore, no surprise that the importance of testimony, both epistemological and practical, is nearly universally accepted.³

Take Lackey at her word and one might struggle to distinguish between traditional epistemology and social epistemology. This is because traditional epistemology largely seems to involve a great deal of social epistemology. One initial path might be to understand traditional epistemology as focused on problems concerning non-social knowledge acquisition, and social epistemology

social knowledge acquisition. However, on this view, many traditional epistemological topics are commandeered into the domain of social epistemology.

An example of such appropriation could be viewing our sense perception as a kind of testimony; a testimony of the senses. Historically, issues of sense perception and knowledge have been central to traditional epistemology. To take sense data as a kind of testimony, one would only need to hypothesise a Cartesian style distinction between the ‘inner citadel’ of the mind and the world around that citadel, as reported by that sense data. The senses could be thought of as scouts, ‘reporting back’ to the inner citadel details concerning the world ‘out there’. On such an understanding, the sensory equipment is viewed as external to the self. As such, questions of trust can arise.

This is not the only way we can take what might be regarded as a question of traditional epistemology and think more socially about it: take for instance Foley’s *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*, where he considers questions about trusting one’s future and past self. If we conceive of a past and future self as separate to one’s present self, then issues of trust arise again without concerning anyone else; only who I was, who I am, and who I will be. Additionally, there are far more radical approaches in the vein of social constructivism:

In suggesting that it is communities that construct and acquire knowledge, I do not mean (or “merely” mean) that what comes to be recognized or “certified” as knowledge is the result of collaboration between, consensus achieved by, political struggles engaged with in, negotiations undertaken among, or other activities engaged in by individuals who as *individuals*, know in some logically or empirically “prior” sense... My arguments suggest that the collaborator’s, the consensus
achievers, and, in more general terms, the agents who generate knowledge are communities and subcommunities, not individuals.⁴

This reinforces the question of why bother with conceptualising of social epistemology as an independent domain. By doing traditional epistemology haven’t we really been doing social epistemology all along? What about an appeal to history?

Western epistemology is an old subject. It enjoys a very long history. Understanding at least some of the history of epistemology is key to unlocking the standard vernacular used by epistemologists. Take for example the three following terms, one from decades ago, one from centuries ago and one millennia old in its origin: Gettier problem, evil demon problem, and the road to Larissa or *Meno* problem. The Gettier problem concerns the fact that one could have a justified true belief, but not knowledge. As such, the Gettier problem points toward an extra condition to be added to justified true belief before any given proposition counts as known. The evil demon problem refers to Descartes’ famous meditation, where Descartes postulates that an evil demon could be entirely deceiving his senses. In such a situation, how could he know anything about a material world, including its very existence? The *Meno* problem concerns why a justified true belief is any better than a mere true belief: if we were to come to a fork in a road, with one path that leads to Larissa and one that leads elsewhere, and we in fact believed that the road we were about to take leads to Larissa, and that path did in fact lead to

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Larissa, then what difference would us being justified in that belief make? We would be taking the correct path regardless of whether we were justified.

Modern epistemology still wrestles with these problems, and the history-steeped language forms a part of the fabric of the subject. These problems however are not problems typically thought to fall within the domain of social epistemology. So could we offer a historically based distinction? If we do, it will be open to heavy critique. For instance, Plato asks distinctly epistemological and distinctly socio-epistemological questions. An example of this is the *Charmides*, an entire dialogue concerned with the recognition of expertise in oneself and others; a question which is both socio-epistemological and epistemological. An appeal to history will not serve well if social epistemology can be argued to start over two millennia ago.

What about questions of definition or value? The *Meno* problem and the Gettier problem both pertain to either an issue of value or definition: in the case of the *Meno* the value of justification when combined with true belief, and in the Gettier case the definition of knowledge. Could this type of distinction work, where questions of value or definition are distinctly epistemological, rather than socially epistemological? Perhaps, but this may severely diminish the scope of traditional epistemology. One further last ditch effort might have us draw a distinction between normative and non-normative epistemology. For example, questions concerning whom we ought to trust or what to do in the face of peer disagreement can be distinguished on normative/non-normative grounds with theories concerning the nature of epistemic rationality. The problem with this is that social and traditional epistemology span both normative and non-normative issues.
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The answer is, I believe, not to pay too much mind to the distinction between social epistemology and traditional epistemology. I do not think we should demand too much from it. If we were to think of philosophy as ice-cream, and moral philosophy as banana flavoured ice-cream, metaphysics as strawberry flavoured ice-cream, and epistemology as chocolate flavoured, social epistemology might well be thought of as mint chocolate flavoured ice-cream. Social epistemology does have its own distinct flavour, but is more of an extension of a pre-existing flavour. It is in this vein that I understand social epistemology to be epistemology with a social aspect or edge. Mint chocolate flavoured ice-cream is chocolate flavoured ice-cream, but with aspect of or edge of mint. The following quote lends itself to such an understanding:

The need for social routes to knowledge is dramatized in modern life by the rampant specialization of knowledge. Practical questions about daily life and public affairs cannot be confidently or responsibly answered without appeal to experts in one or another technical area of inquiry. How safe is the food we eat, the medicines we take? What will the consequences of this or that use of the environment, of this or that energy policy, of this or that method of teaching children to read? These are familiar examples of the exploding number of questions that cannot be reliably answered without appeal to special expertise. No single person can possibly attain all the relevant forms of expertise; each of us must rely on others. But on whom, exactly should we rely? Which experts, or alleged experts, should be trusted? Unfortunately, so-called experts often disagree, and when they do, they cannot all be right. Which one should the novice or layperson trust? Upon hearing two rival experts offer conflicting viewpoints, can the novice justifiably trust either one? How can such justified belief be attained.
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After all, novices often struggle to get even a bare comprehension of what experts are saying. When they do understand them, how can they appraise the relative merits of their esoteric arguments? This is, I believe, a fundamental problem in social epistemology. Perhaps it is a special case of the general epistemological problem of testimony, but it is particularly acute when a novice confronts conflicting expert testimony.¹

In this way social epistemology should not be understood as a “…replacement or successor subject, one that should supplant classical epistemology once the latter’s demise is acknowledged.”⁶ Instead, social epistemology should be understood as epistemology with a particularly social flavour; like chocolate ice-cream with a particularly minty flavour.

0.2) Intellectual Expertise

We live in an expertise saturated society. Driving a car, riding a bike, business management, logistics, physics and a great many other subject matters are all subject matters about which people can possess expertise. A general theory of the nature and structure of expertise would encompass each domain about which there can be expertise. A comprehensive general theory of expertise would consider all relevant aspects of being an expert; theoretical as well as practical. That theory, in order to be robust, would also be applicable throughout all eras and societies and not readily handicapped by counterexamples.

By contrast the theory I offer is modest. My intention is to clarify the nature and structure of intellectual expertise. My theory of intellectual expertise is limited to an account of the nature and structure of what I call intellectual expertise. My concern is to offer a robust theory. A theory not readily handicapped by counterexamples and that is applicable throughout all eras and societies. As such my thesis is primarily revisionist in character, but is not exhaustive.\footnote{My theory of intellectual expertise outlines a way to understand the nature of intellectual expertise that overcomes problems associated with more traditional accounts. However, the conditions I outline should be understood as necessary conditions for intellectual expertise, and as not sufficient conditions for intellectual expertise.}

I present my thesis in two parts. I offer a preface to each part to clarify for the reader what the aim of the part is. As a preliminary, part 1 is about building the theory. It is about the nature and structure of intellectual expertise. Again as a preliminary, part 2 is about positioning the theory within the domain of social epistemology, but also in analytic philosophy more generally. Both parts are theoretical in nature, although part 2 is more applicative than part 1.

Part 1 consists of chapters 1 through to 6. Part 2 consists of chapters 7 through to 9. I will now provide a brief overview of each chapter.

\textbf{0.2.1) An Overview of Each Chapter}

1) What exactly is intellectual expertise? An account of the nature of intellectual expertise as well as its defence will be the burden of this entire work. A better question to start with concerns the way in which intellectual expertise is different from any other type of expertise. The purpose of the first chapter will be to outline what differentiates intellectual expertise from
non-intellectual expertise. I outline this by examining a conception of cognitive and skill expertise provided by Goldman, a general account of expertise as intuition based on experience provided by Dreyfus and Dreyfus, and a Platonic conception of expertise as account giving. A preliminary answer to the question of what makes intellectual expertise different from any other type of expertise, is that intellectual expertise is a matter of possessing propositional information pertaining to why something is the case. The ‘why’ will be either teleological or causal in nature. Intellectual expertise is the expertise often exemplified by scientists. By contrast other theories such as the Dreyfus conception of expertise do not necessarily require the possession of propositional information.

2) The second chapter may be the most controversial of the entire thesis.

With intellectual expertise understood as being a matter of possessing propositional information, in the second chapter I argue that such information need not be true; that is, the possession of knowledge is not a pre-requisite of intellectual expertise. I argue that if the possession of knowledge is taken to be a pre-requisite of intellectual expertise, where knowledge is understood as justified true belief, then it could be the case that intellectual experts do not exist. Consequently the term ‘expert’, at least in the case of intellectual expertise, may be vacuous. Such a

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8 Why not propositional knowledge? In the second chapter I criticise accounts of expertise that presuppose propositional knowledge, where knowledge is understood as entailing truth. I propose that any sensible account of intellectual expertise cannot presuppose the truth of the views of the intellectual expert.

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conclusion seems to present a stark contrast with the world around us. One could take the stark contrast as an argument for an alternative understanding of knowledge. Instead I take the stark contrast to be an argument for revising the pre-requisites of intellectual expertise. Of the traditional criteria implied by or required for knowledge, only truth proves to be problematic. As such, my theory of intellectual expertise will neither presuppose nor require the possession of any propositional knowledge.

The first two chapters taken together indicate what any sensible theory of intellectual expertise requires in order to be successful. Intellectual expertise does not require the truth of the intellectual expert’s beliefs, only their epistemic justification given the information and methodologies both appropriate and available at that time in history. Intellectual expertise does require the possession of propositional information pertaining to why something is the case. Those propositions concerning ‘why’ will be teleological or causal in nature.

3) The third chapter will examine Foley’s theory of epistemic rationality. In examining Foley’s theory of epistemic rationality, I will also examine related concepts such as doxastic rationality, responsible and non-negligent belief.

Briefly, a proposition is epistemically rational for you if it ‘makes sense’ given your other beliefs, and information you are aware of. A proposition is doxastically rational (again briefly) if it is believed for the ‘right’ reasons. I argue that a combination of epistemic and doxastic rationality, what Foley calls a rich conception of epistemic rationality, can replace knowledge as a
prerequisite of intellectual expertise. Foley’s subjective foundationalism provides the framework for my theory of intellectual expertise.

4) The fourth chapter concerns how many ‘intellectual expertise constituting beliefs’ intellectual expertise presupposes. We sometimes take being an expert to be a matter of being the best, or of being among the best in a certain field. In this chapter I consider three distinct qualification conceptions.

The first I consider is a comparative conception of intellectual expertise. On the comparative conception qualification as an intellectual expertise is simply a matter of being among the best.

The second conception I consider is a hybrid conception that combines both a comparative qualification conception and a threshold qualification conception. On this combined conception, intellectual expertise is understood as being among the best of those that pass a threshold.

Lastly I consider a threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification. On this conception one must have a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs.

I endorse and argue for the threshold conception. I argue that qualifying as an intellectual expert is a non-comparative matter. It concerns passing a certain threshold of beliefs which are constitutive of intellectual expertise. Consequently, there is no upper or lower limit on how many

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people may count as an intellectual expert on any given domain. As such, I argue that intellectual expertise is not necessarily esoteric.

The third and fourth chapters taken together offer the building blocks for my theory of intellectual expertise. Being an intellectual expert is a matter of having a certain number of epistemically and doxastically rational account giving beliefs pertaining to any particular domain. They will need to be doxastically and epistemically rational given the information reasonably attainable in any given society at any given time. Moreover these chapters work together to demonstrate that with a reliance on a framework of subjective foundationalism, my theory of intellectual expertise can accommodate for intellectual expertise from humanities humble epistemic origins, all the way through to the heights of modern scientific inquiry. My theory is both flexible and accommodating.

5) In this chapter I analyse responses to the ‘uniqueness thesis’, which is the claim that any one pool of evidence supports one of three attitudes towards any given proposition; belief, suspension of judgement, or disbelief. The uniqueness thesis does not offer any direct challenge to my theory of intellectual expertise, so simultaneously endorsing my theory of intellectual expertise and the uniqueness thesis is unproblematic.

What may instead be problematic for intellectual expertise is epistemic relativism, and in particular, the thesis that there is no truth about

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10 Strictly speaking doxastic rationality is not required. What is required is that the intellectual expert’s beliefs be epistemically rational in a rich sense of the term. See my chapter 3 for more details.

11 There are some detailed exceptions to this rule that I discuss within the chapter.
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justification—about what justifies what. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to respond to the challenge of epistemic relativism. I place my theory of intellectual expertise within a framework of epistemic objectivism in order to give intellectual expertise what I term ‘bite’. If there is no truth about justification, such that any evidence can legitimately support any proposition, then intellectual expertise and the emphasis placed on teleological and causal account giving is rendered redundant. As such, I defend a position of epistemic absolutism.

6) Chapter 6 is focused on an expression I introduce, ‘epistemic success’. I introduce the notion of epistemic success in order to provide an achievable goal of epistemic inquiry. In many past cases (and perhaps in some present cases too), the truth about a certain matter, say whether P is or is not the case, will be unobtainable. Additionally, because intellectual expertise does not require knowledge or any truth, it could be the case that everything the intellectual expert believes, and that it is epistemically rational for the intellectual expert to believe within a certain domain, is ultimately not true. This may have been the case for famous past experts such as Aristotle.\footnote{Aristotle is a good example of a historical intellectual expert. I use the example of Aristotle as an historical intellectual expert throughout the thesis. I also mention Newton and Darwin in the same vein.} It cannot be ruled out that from an objective point of view any intellectual expert could be largely incorrect, and as such it would seem to be the case that there could be a disjoin between intellectual expertise and epistemic
success, where epistemic success is taken to imply or presuppose knowledge.

This however is counter-intuitive. Pre-reflectively, it would seem that one can simultaneously hold that intellectual experts are epistemically successful, that there are in fact many intellectual experts, and that epistemic success entails actually getting to the truth.

I argue that there is in fact no disjoin between epistemic success and intellectual expertise, provided we understand epistemic success in a less epistemically demanding way. As such, I argue for a conception of ‘weak’ epistemic success, which is exemplified by epistemic rationality. I argue that weak epistemic success can serve as a goal replacement of inquiry to knowledge and truth. This shift in emphasis follows Foley’s guiding aim of an unapologetic epistemology. It follows a more pragmatic, or what I term, ‘mortal’ approach to epistemology that accepts and attempts to advance forward with an appreciation of the potentially dire state of our epistemic facticity.

Chapters 5 and 6 perform multiple functions. A first function they serve is to clarify the nature of intellectual expertise. When it comes to epistemic relativism versus absolutism, epistemic absolutism is the only position which allows intellectual expertise to meaningful. Moreover, we can conceive of intellectual experts as being epistemically successful, even without truth, albeit successful in a weaker way. These two chapters help locate my theory of intellectual expertise in the wider domains of epistemology and social epistemology. They help to identify
what burdens my theory of intellectual expertise entails. These burdens include both an acceptance of epistemic absolutism and at least scepticism concerning the success of Cartesian epistemology.

These six chapters conclude part 1 of the thesis, which focuses on building and clarifying the nature and structure of my theory of intellectual expertise. The next three chapters are focused on both demonstrating the explanatory power of my theory of intellectual expertise, and the positions it allows me to take in some relevant debates.

7) In chapter 7 I turn toward issues concerning the relationship between intellectual experts and democracy. In particular, I focus on Estlund’s argument for the modest epistemic weight of democratic arrangements. Estlund’s defence of democratic arrangements aims to secure democratic arrangements a modest epistemic weight when operating under idealised conditions. I offer three criticisms of Estlund’s argument.

I start by arguing that epistemically good outcomes generated by idealised conditions cannot be used to defend the epistemic prowess of democratic arrangements. What such outcomes defend is the epistemic prowess of the epistemically good inputs into democratic procedures, and not the democratic procedures themselves.

I claim secondly that Estlund’s argument could be used to defend the epistemic prowess of any and every type of government. It is not clear that any government could fail when operating under the idealised conditions
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described by Estlund. Those conditions imply that all inputs into governmental procedures are necessarily reasonable.¹³

I argue thirdly that it is not clear that democratic arrangements are epistemically creditworthy or praiseworthy when operating under idealised conditions. Epistemic credit or praise requires, so I argue, the possibility of failure; a possibility which does not appear to exist under the ideal conditions described by Estlund.

I finally offer some reflections about measuring the epistemic prowess of any given government. I claim that the epistemic prowess of any particular government depends largely upon the views of the time and culture.

8) In chapter 8 I argue for the possibility of two distinct domains of intellectual expertise. Intellectual moral expertise and intellectual expertise about morality. I start the chapter by noting just how controversial the issue of moral expertise is. I note that such controversy is not limited to moral expertise, but the role of truth in democratic politics as well. Both truth and the possibility of moral expertise are considered challenges to democratic authority and political autonomy.

Next I outline that intellectual moral expertise does not necessarily presuppose the truth of moral objectivism. I argue that there are conditions under which it is epistemically rational to believe that moral objectivism is

¹³ For more information about what Estlund takes to constitute a failure of government, in particular an epistemic failure of government, see chapter 7.
true, even if ultimately moral objectivism is not true. Further, I argue that so long as one has a sufficient quantity of positive intellectual expertise constituting beliefs falling within the appropriate domain, they will have satisfied my stated criteria for status as an intellectual expert.

I then proceed to explain why I categorise moral non-objectivist philosophers as intellectual experts about morality. Such non-objectivist philosophers may not be able to hold, in a way which is constitutive of intellectual expertise, views about the truth of certain ethical propositions. As far as they might be concerned, ethical statements have no truth value. I categorise such philosophers and ethicists as intellectual experts about morality. Their intellectual expertise may lie more in meta-ethics than normative ethics.

I lastly offer some rebuttals to the more famous and older arguments against both the existence and possibility of moral expertise.

While chapters 7 and 8 help to further clarify my theory of intellectual expertise, their role is also far more applicative. In the case of chapter 7, we see how a subjective foundationalist position, the position on which I build my theory of intellectual expertise, might respond to certain kinds of epistemic measurements, the methodology of which I argue is questionable. Chapter 8 demonstrates how a controversial and difficult question concerning the existence of moral experts can be settled using my theory of intellectual expertise. The theory I provide is flexible enough to accommodate for the existence of intellectual moral expertise without insisting upon the truth of the moral intellectual expert’s
beliefs. Moreover, the traditional arguments against moral expertise are readily sated. As such, chapters 7 and 8 demonstrate the robustness and flexibility of my theory of intellectual expertise.

9) Chapter 9 is the final chapter of the thesis, and it follows on quite naturally from both the previous chapter and some of the overall themes of the thesis: testimony issues aside, can we reliably defer to intellectual experts? Can we do so if we want truth? What about epistemically robust beliefs? What if we simply wanted to be beyond fair epistemic critique? In this chapter, I review the literature on epistemic authority, the positions of epistemic egoism, epistemic egotism, and epistemic universalism. When it comes to intellectual trust, I conclude that laypeople should exercise what I term ‘healthy scepticism’. By healthy scepticism, I do not mean anything like philosophical doubt. I mean that laypeople should take the advice of intellectual experts as being open to revision, and upon occasion serious revision. Not always as the final word.

I said before that my theory of intellectual expertise was rightly categorised as falling within the domain of social epistemology. The theory of intellectual expertise I provide goes beyond traditional epistemology in many ways. In chapter 1 the theory is set against a backdrop of research from the domain of psychology and cognitive science. In chapter 5 the theory is placed within a framework of epistemic absolutism and deals with issues concerning epistemic relativism. In chapter 7 my theory of intellectual expertise proves instructive in critiquing the
methodology of a political philosopher. In chapter 8, the theory is used to advocate the existence of moral expertise.

While there is no doubt the unmistakable mark of epistemology to each and every chapter, this thesis goes beyond the strict confines of traditional epistemology. Social epistemology is to epistemology, as mint chocolate ice-cream is to chocolate ice-cream. As such, my theory of intellectual expertise is a thesis in the domain of social epistemology.
Part 1: Building A Theory of Intellectual Expertise

The Nature and Structure of Intellectual Expertise
Preface to Part 1

In part 1 I define what I mean by the term ‘intellectual expertise’. I explain and identify some necessary conditions of intellectual expertise. However I do more than this. Not only do I make the case for each and every condition, I also make the case for the very idea of intellectual expertise, and for proposing a revisionist doctrine.

I make the case for such revisions primarily in chapter 2. This comes after I identify in chapter 1 room for a conception of propositional, account giving expertise. However chapters 1 and 2 do not actually do the job of revising traditional accounts of expertise. In chapters 1 and 2, I identify what it is that needs revising and the extent of the revision necessary. Together, chapters 1 and 2 provide information concerning what a successful conception of intellectual expertise will need to avoid.

In the case of chapter 1 this occurs through an identification of certain weaknesses in alternative conceptions of expertise. In the case of chapter 2, I note how unpalatable the consequences are of a conception of intellectual expertise that presupposes knowledge.

The actual revision to traditional accounts and the outline of my proposed revisions occurs primarily in chapter 3. Chapter 3 does much of the hard work on clarifying the structure of intellectual expertise. It is here that I bring in Foley, an author central to my work, to help with providing a robust foundation for intellectual expertise. That robust foundation comes from his account of epistemic
rationality.\textsuperscript{1} Such clarification on the structure continues into chapter 4, and together chapter 3 and 4 provide the guts of the theory of intellectual expertise.

In chapter 5 I work not so much on the foundation of intellectual expertise, as opposed to the foundation of the foundation of intellectual expertise: I work on issues of epistemic relativism and epistemic absolutism. The foundation of intellectual expertise is robust justification, and the foundation of robust justification is epistemic absolutism. As I claim in chapter 5, my theory of intellectual expertise requires a framework of epistemic absolutism to have bite.

Finally, part 1 is concluded by securing a meaningful epistemic marker for intellectual experts: weak epistemic success. If past intellectual experts possessed very few, if any truths, there are questions about whether or not those intellectual experts were epistemically successful. To deal with this issue, I identify a conception of epistemic success that I call ‘weak’ epistemic success. I argue that weak epistemic success is a matter of robust justification, and not truth.

Together these chapters provide an outline for the nature and structure of intellectual expertise. Moreover, they provide a perspective that allows for a meaningful conception of intellectual expertise.

\textsuperscript{1} Though this is not to say that intellectual expertise is limited specifically to Foley’s conception of epistemic rationality. I have no doubt that there may be other conceptions of epistemic rationality which may allow for a similar account of intellectual expertise.
Chapter 1: Intellectual Expertise

In this chapter I will argue for a distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise. I will focus on the nature of intellectual expertise. I will firstly clarify some of my terminology, and in particular, the difference between knowing that, and knowing how. I will also highlight the difference between a type of expertise and a domain of expertise. I then secondly explore Goldman’s distinction between skill and cognitive expertise. I will utilise Goldman’s brief schema as a starting point for a distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise. I will then examine an account of expertise provided by Dreyfus and Dreyfus. I will raise doubts about the accuracy of this account through the use of an empirical study. Additionally, I will outline an example used by McDowell to highlight some of the limits to the Dreyfus conception of expertise. Lastly, I will conclude with some reflections on Plato’s account of expertise, fashioning intellectual expertise loosely on Plato’s ‘account giving’ model. In particular, I shall say that intellectual expertise is an account giving type of expertise. The kind of account appropriate for intellectual expertise is propositional, and is either teleological or casual in nature.

1.1) Terminology

I take know-how to be a disposition or ability. Typically, skills such as riding a bike or driving a car are thought of as a matter of know-how; that is as an ability. The abilities to drive and ride are not normally thought of as reducible to a series of

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propositional statements. By contrast, propositional statements are often characterised as ‘know-that’: that the world is round, or that London is the capital of England. I know-that London is the capital of England, but I know-how to ride a bike.

The burden of the following sections is to set up and clarify a distinction between two types of expertise; intellectual and non-intellectual expertise. By a type of expertise I mean whether or not the expertise in question is an intellectual type, or a non-intellectual type. Other philosophers such as Goldman contrast different types of expertise, such as cognitive and skill expertise.

A domain of expertise refers to the subject area of the expertise. For example, any particular chemist or physicist may qualify as an intellectual expert. While the chemist and physicist are both intellectual experts, the domain of their expertise is different. One pertains to physics, and the other chemistry. In this case the type of expertise is the same while the domain is different.

1.2) Goldman

My examination of Goldman’s position will involve some interpretation of the distinction Goldman draws between skill and cognitive expertise. I will use my interpretation of Goldman’s position to provide a preliminary look at the distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise.

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2 There has been great controversy in philosophical circles regarding whether know-how can be ‘broken down’ into series of rules or instructions. I take know-how and Know-that to be distinct, and properly basic.

3 Some philosophers also make recourse to other types of knowledge that they regard as distinct: for example, ‘know-which’. Know-which is claimed to concern ones capacity to recognise. In this chapter I will speak only of know-that and know-how. My arguments need not take into account other types of knowledge, such as know-which.
In one of the relevant key paragraphs in “Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust” Goldman claims that:

Some kinds of experts are unusually accomplished at certain skills, including violinists, billiards players, textile designers, and so forth. These are not the kinds of experts with which epistemology is most naturally concerned. For epistemological purposes we shall mainly focus on cognitive or intellectual experts: people who have (or claim to have) a superior quantity or level of knowledge in some domain and an ability to generate new knowledge in answer to questions within the domain. Admittedly, there are elements of skill or know-how in intellectual matters too, so the boundary between skill expertise and cognitive expertise is not a sharp one.  

The distinction Goldman draws is between cognitive and skill expertise. Cognitive experts are those who have or claim to have a superior quantity or level of knowledge in some domain. By contrast skill experts are accomplished at certain skills. Goldman uses the term “skill” interchangeably with ‘know-how’ when he claims that “…there are elements of skill or know-how in intellectual matters…”.

Although Goldman does not directly make the following claim, it follows that skill expertise is exemplified by domains which are primarily matters of know-how, while cognitive expertise is exemplified by domains which are primarily matters of know-that. I take this to be the case because Goldman claims that cognitive experts have greater quantities of knowledge. The reason that speaking of ‘quantities’ of

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5 I take the skills at which the skill expert is accomplished to be relevant to the domain of which the skill expert is in fact expert.

Rocky Webb
knowledge is indicative of know-that is because know-that is typically thought to be quantifiable, whereas by contrast, know-how is less typically thought to be quantifiable. Moreover, Goldman’s admission that know-how forms only a part of cognitive expertise indicates that the remainder consists in know-that. The juxtaposition between skill and cognitive expertise could be exemplified by the juxtaposition between an expert violinist and expert chemist respectively.

According to Goldman, skill expertise is primarily a matter of know-how, and cognitive expertise a matter of possessing superior quantities of knowledge; superior that is, to the rest of the community. Yet the distinction between skill and cognitive expertise is thin. This is because cognitive expertise isn’t just a matter of know-that, but also know-how:

An expert has the (cognitive) know-how, when presented with a new question in the domain, to go to the right sectors of his information-bank and perform appropriate operations on this information; or to deploy some external apparatus or data-banks to disclose relevant material.

By contrast, Goldman does not claim that skill expertise consists partly in know-that; however, this may be a sensible position to hold. Typically we think that expert billiard players possess the skill of actually taking a good shot: this skill of taking a ‘good’ shot pertains to know-how. But we further think that expert billiard players will have knowledge about the rules of the game. This knowledge we might regard as pertaining to cognitive expertise, or at least, pertaining more to cognitive

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expertise than skill expertise. This is because knowledge of the rules of the game is propositional knowledge. Likewise, the shot a professional golfer takes in terms of the swing itself pertains to know-how; knowing how to take the shot is an often refined ability to perform well, or expertly. By contrast, knowing the rules of the game is a matter of know-that. At least I take this to be straightforwardly the case.

Goldman’s worry about the distinction between skill and cognitive expertise being thin is based on his position that intellectual expertise does involve some know-how. However, Goldman’s distinction could also be thin if skill expertise involves, in some cases, know-that: like in the case of the billiards player, or the golfer.

Due to the thinness of Goldman’s distinction, I shall not adopt his distinction for use in my theory of intellectual expertise. Later, I shall make a sharper distinction between the relevantly similar intellectual and non-intellectual expertise. However, before making this sharper distinction, I will examine the position held by Dreyfus and Dreyfus which denies the existence of different types of expertise altogether. I refer to the position held by Dreyfus and Dreyfus as the ‘Dreyfus conception of expertise’.

1.3) The Dreyfus Conception of Expertise

My examination of the Dreyfus conception of expertise will focus primarily on the position outlined in *Mind over Machine*. The position argued for in *Mind over Machine* is that expertise is almost exclusively a matter of intuition based upon

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experience. I will respond to this claim in two ways: I make my first response by utilising some empirical evidence from the domain of cognitive science which indicates that expertise is not almost exclusively a matter of intuition. My second response is to suggest that there is a distinction to be made between expert performance, and what it means to be an expert, aside from when performing.

1.3.1) Chess and Critical Reflection

In *Mind over Machine* Dreyfus and Dreyfus use many anecdotal examples: driving a car, Polanyi’s riding a bike, and perhaps most strikingly playing chess. Chess is a striking example because it is something which commonly appears to be based on reflective thought, rules and almost certainly not intuition. Typically we take chess to be about thinking moves through, what our opponent is up to, and how to scupper their plans, putting their position to our advantage. That is pre-reflectively, one might safely presume expert chess play pertains to know-that and not know-how.

Some of the cognitive science involved understanding expertise has focused on chess play, and specifically the conditions which improve and worsen the performance of chess play at master and grandmaster level. In reviewing the science, Dreyfus and Dreyfus quote Simon who studied “…the chess master’s almost instantaneous understanding of chess positions and accompanying compelling sense of the best move. He [Simon] found that chess masters are familiar with thousands of patterns, which he calls chunks. Each chunk is a remembered description of a small group of pieces in a certain relationship to each other. He conjectures that a desirable move or chess idea is associated with each
A Theory of Intellectual Expertise

such chunk. Hence moves spring to mind as chunks are recognized without need for rule-like calculations.”

Simon concluded as he did “...because a great decrease in time to think during simultaneous-exhibition play against a total of 56 considerably weaker masters in nine separate displays apparently did not lead to much loss in the quality of play expected from Gary Kasparov’s average ELO performance rating based on slow play...” This in turn led to the conclusion that “…recognition processes must be considerably more important than searching and evaluating.”

Dreyfus and Dreyfus do not endorse Simon’s position. They do not endorse the view that expert chess play involves ‘chunks’ of propositional information. However Dreyfus and Dreyfus do endorse the position that searching and evaluating, or critically reflecting on what move is best, is less important in expert chess play than the expert chess player’s intuition about what move is best. As such, Dreyfus and Dreyfus argue that expertise in chess, a domain typically thought to exemplify a cognitive or intellectual type of expertise, is primarily a matter of intuition and not propositional information, deduction and analytic calculation.

The aim of Simon’s test was to examine whether chess performance is influenced by giving chess masters increased time to critically reflect on each move. Simon concluded that the time available did not create much if any difference to the quality of chess play at the grandmaster level. However the position Simon

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came to given his evidence and methodology is far from conclusive: for example, Simon’s experiment used “…performance ratings that failed to take into account the variability of Kasparov’s ELO rating... [and] subjective judgements of move quality ...in which the judgements failed to distinguish between fast and versus slow play in masters as well as (tellingly) the moves of strong versus much weaker players in slow play only.”

A more recent study has concluded that there is a significant increase in the quality of chess play at the expert level, when the time given for players to think about each move is increased. Chabris and Hearst “…compared a very large sample of actual grandmaster tournament games played under “rapid” conditions (approximately 25-30 min for each player for all the moves in a game, usually about 40-50 moves for each player, thus averaging less than 1 min per move) with a large sample of games played by the same opponents under standard “slow” tournament conditions (averaging 3 min per move, usually at 40 moves in 2h for each player), approximately the same time values that Gobet and Simon compared in their analysis of Kasparov’s play.” Chabris and Hearst did not rely upon a subjective analysis of chess play. Instead the samples were analysed by a computer. The analysis involved comparing the number of blunders made across the slow and fast games. A quick and easy way to understand the meaning of blunder would be as a

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13 Chabris, C., F., and Hearst, E., S., (2003), Visualization, pattern recognition, and forward search: effects of playing speed and sight chess of the position on grandmaster chess errors, *Cognitive Science*, 27, 637-648, 644. I have both added and removed certain brackets from the original text to provide clarity.


critical mistake in a game. However, only blunders which actually led to the loss of a game were counted.

The results were clear: Chabris and Hearst found that there was an increase of critical errors when moving from slow to fast play of 36.5%.

The position supported in *Mind over Machine* is that “…excellent chess players can play at the rate of five to ten seconds a move and even faster without serious degradation in performance. At that speed they must depend almost entirely on intuition and hardly at all on analysis and comparing alternatives.”

Quoting Dreyfus and Dreyfus from multiple sources, Selinger states that according to the Dreyfus conception of expertise, “…the expert not only sees what needs to be done, but also how to achieve it without deliberation, immediately, yet “unconsciously” recognising “new situations as similar to the whole remembered ones” and intuiting “what to do without recourse to rules”. Thus, the expert, like masters in the “long Zen tradition” or Luke Skywalker when responding to Obi Wan Kenobi’s advice to “use the force,” transcends “trying” or “efforting” and “just responds”. Moreover, Dreyfus and Dreyfus claim that “…[w]hen things are proceeding normally, experts don’t solve problems and don’t make decisions; they do what normally works.”

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However contrary to the claims of Dreyfus and Dreyfus, the study performed by Chabris and Hearst indicates that there is an improvement of 36.5% in performance between slow and fast play. This is with an analysis which is under conditions generous to the position in *Mind over Machine*. After all, only blunders which resulted in the loss of a game were counted. In other words, had all blunders been counted, the results difference in performance may have been more dramatic. A performance difference of 36.5% should cast considerable doubt on the view that expertise in chess is almost exclusively a matter of intuition.

We might make a case against the position of Dreyfus and Dreyfus by claiming that... “[n]o one strongly disputes the point that recognition of patterns, chunks, “clues” or templates—as well as forward search—both constitute essential parts of the skilled chess player’s arsenal of weapons. The open question has been whether, of all the moves that quickly present themselves as likely candidates for the best move, the detailed analysis and evaluation of their consequences is as crucial and perhaps of greater importance than the initial recognition processes in accounting for a grandmaster’s superior level of performance.”

This is to say that there are some additional important aspects to playing expert chess aside from intuition and experience alone.

One might be tempted to claim that if critical reflection leads to only a 36.5% increase in performance then expertise in chess is largely intuition and experience-based. One may or may not be correct in such a claim, in terms of the referenced percentile. Cognitive science is still a comparatively young domain, and

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further analysis might more accurately pinpoint exactly what difference critical reflection makes generally. Moreover, we might reasonably believe that critical reflection will lead to a greater improvement for some individuals than it would do others. Additionally, it might be worth remembering that 36.5% is over the swing necessary for an undergraduate essay to move from the mark of a second, class two, to the mark of a first. This is to say that an increase of 36.5% will make a mediocre mark exceptional and the exceptional comparatively dire. McDowell has an example which captures the limits of the Dreyfus conception of expertise:

...any animal—rational or not—with suitable sensory equipment, engaged in getting from one place to another, can be expected, other things being equal, to respond to the affordance constituted by a sufficiently large opening, in a wall that otherwise blocks its path, by going through the opening. But the truth about a human being’s exercise of competence in making her way around, in a performance that can be described like that, need not be exhausted by the match with what can be said about, say, a cat’s correspondingly describable response to a corresponding affordance. The human being’s response is, if you like, indistinguishable from the cat’s response qua response to an affordance described in those terms. But it does not follow that the human being’s response cannot be unlike the cat’s response in being the human being’s rationality at work.21

Experts have intuitions and those intuitions may constitute a large part of the expertise of the expert. But experience based intuition is not necessarily where the limit of all expertise lies. Unlike cats, humans may not just know-how but also

know-that, and experts do not just know on the basis of experience, but can often apply abstract thought in a way which leads to improvement. There is room for both know-how and know-that within a complete conception of expertise, and this room will allow us to draw a distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise.

1.3.2) Expert Performance

Another way we might be tempted to respond to the Dreyfus conception of expertise would be to accept but limit the account of expertise to an account of a certain type of expert (for instance Goldman’s skill expert). We might then further limit their account to an account of skill experts when ‘performing’, by which I mean when acting in their capacity as an expert: for example, when a racing driver is actually racing.

By limiting the Dreyfus conception of expertise in this way, the Dreyfus conception ceases to be about expertise in general. The Dreyfus conception of expertise becomes far more limited. To what degree is the Dreyfus conception limited? The answer is not only to skill expertise, but skill experts when actively performing in their capacity as experts.

What impact does this have? It means we can accept the gist of the Dreyfus conception of expertise—to the extent that we take it as a conception of a certain type of expert while performing in their capacity as an expert—and not accept the conception offered by the Dreyfus brothers as a claim about the nature of expertise in general. In turn, this allows us to reserve a meaningful place for reflective
thought in a conception of intellectual expertise, as well as propositional information. This is because both the Dreyfus conception and the account of intellectual expertise that I will provide will operate independently.

Expert actors or expert racing drivers may not critically reflect when performing; it would be fitting if experts in relevantly similar domains relied more on previous experience and intuition with regard to their active performance there and then, rather than continual critical analysis. Some might find it comical to imagine that a racing driver is continually critically reflecting with every slight movement of the wheel, or that an actor in the midst of a performance is applying abstract rules to every slight delivery of a line or movement upon the stage. Some might find it harder to believe that it was this critical reflection which constituted, there and then, that driver or actor’s expertise as opposed to the actual driving or acting. Dreyfus and Dreyfus might add that experts would not need to engage in such continual critical reflection because they, the experts, would have already transcended that stage of ‘following rules’ on their path to expertise.

However it is not comical to think that when off of the stage or track that the expert actor or racing driver does in fact critically reflect on their performance, what could be improved about it, and that this critical reflection itself goes some way to constituting their expertise. “In what way could I better deliver this line so as to get across the intentions of this character?” or “I should position the car like this in order to gain more speed around this corner.”Ironically the Dreyfus brothers do offer a similar account of the role of critical analysis in their five stage

22 The exception to this would be if one took the intellectualist view that know-how is collapsible into know-that. However I do not take this to be the case.
acquisition model and concede that experts “…would never have arrived at that stage [expertise] without extensive practice, obtained by means of increasingly tuned analysis and deliberation.”

It is because there seems to be a meaningful place for critical reflection in a complete theory of skill expertise that the Dreyfus conception of expertise must be further limited. It should be limited not only to skill expertise, but to an account of the nature of skill expertise when the expert in question is performing in their capacity as an expert.

Selinger raises a relevantly similar point about there being differing types of expertise when he states that:

...Dreyfus’s account also excludes certain classes of people from being experts who do belong. To appreciate this point, it is necessary to distinguish between ‘expert x,’ which is an adjectival use of ‘expert’ that stems from the Latin expertus, and ‘expert in x,’ which substantively treats ‘expert’ as a noun. In Dreyfus’s terms, ‘Expert x’ corresponds to “knowing how” while ‘expert in x’ corresponds to “knowing that.” Whereas an ‘expert x’ could be an ‘expert farmer,’ an ‘expert in X’ could be an expert “in farming.” An expert “in farming” could effectively communicate, coordinate, and synthesize accurate propositional information about farming—could become Secretary of Agriculture—even if terrified of plows and tractors. An ‘expert in sports,’ who correlates the past behavior of athletes to current situations, could be crippled and lack physical capacity to play the sport; an ‘expert in music’ could be a terrible musician.

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I do not accept the rejection of the importance of critical reflection for expertise. We can limit the Dreyfus conception of expertise in two ways: the first way we can limit the Dreyfus conception of expertise is to claim that the Dreyfus conception of expertise describes a non-intellectual type of expertise. A second way we can limit the Dreyfus conception of expertise is to claim that the Dreyfus conception of expertise is focused on the performance of non-intellectual experts when they are in the process of performing as experts.

By limiting the Dreyfus conception of expertise in these two ways, we secure a place for a distinction between an intellectual and non-intellectual type of expertise. Moreover, by limiting the Dreyfus conception of expertise to a conception regarding non-intellectual expert performance, we may secure a place for critical reflection as a mechanism for the improvement of said non-intellectual expert performance: for when the actor or driver steps back onto the stage or into the car. In this way we need not outright reject the conception of expertise that Dreyfus and Dreyfus offer, but instead sidestep it by limiting its scope.

1.4) Intellectual Expertise as an Account Giving Expertise

Now that room has been secured for a distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise, I will move forward by looking back. In this section I will outline a Platonic distinction between a knack and a craft and the necessity of account giving to intellectual expertise. The Platonic distinction between a knack and a craft will form the starting point for the distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise.
The difference between a knack and a craft lies in whether or not something more than mere experience and replication of that experience is required for competence. We find this claim at *Gorgias* 501a-c when Socrates claims that pastry baking, which he describes as a knack “…proceeds toward its object in a quite uncraftlike way, without having at all considered either the nature of pleasure or its cause. It does so completely irrationally, with virtually no discrimination. Through routine and knack it merely preserves the memory of what customarily happens, and that’s how it also supplies its pleasures.” So for instance, when learning to butter bread, all that might be required is to watch someone else do it, and then replicate what’s been done and witnessed. The same might be said for riding a bike, or for tying a shoe lace. These are not learnt through a series of rules or instructions, but through watching others, and then having a crack at it ourselves; some might say that this practice and intuition is what constitutes, or partly constitutes, know-how. By contrast, a non-physicist seems unlikely to gleam much about physics by merely watching a physicist in action. Without active tuition, it might be expected for any typical layperson to struggle to understand what is going on. Physics, and other similar intellectual disciplines, or even disciplines which have a significant but not exclusive intellectual aspect, typically require instruction, learning, and years of painstaking improvement before one acquires expertise. In the case of more academic disciplines, the focus of those studies is nearly always on giving teleological or causal explanations as to why such and such is the case. By contrast, a knack may characteristically require less instruction and learning. The

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26 Though this may not necessarily be the case. Ultra intelligent beings might master subjects faster than current humans. Moreover, who could say for definite what technological advances future science will bring us.
focus of a knack isn’t on giving an explanation at all. Annas describes the Platonic position as follows:

...expertise is teachable; there is conveyable intellectual content which a learner can learn from a teacher. A skill is intellectually complex and requires thought to acquire; it is not just something which can be picked up casually from experience. Hence it is contrasted with a “knack” (empeiria, literally “experience”), which you can pick up just by copying other people without thinking much about it.  

One of the clearer statements of the distinction between a knack and a craft is found in the Gorgias at 465a when Socrates claims that “…I say that it isn’t a craft, but a knack, because it has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it’s unable to state the cause of each thing. And I refuse to call anything that lacks such an account a craft.”

In the Philebus Socrates considers what would be left if someone took away all “…counting, measuring, and weighing from the arts and crafts… All we would have left would be conjecture and the training of our senses through experience and routine. We would have to rely on our ability to make the lucky guesses that many people call art, once is has acquired some proficiency through practice and hard work.”

Annas further claims that the Platonic position is that:

...expertise requires that the expert, unlike the mere muddler or the person with the unintellectual knack, be able to “give an account” (logon didonai) of

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29 Plato, Philebus, trans., Frede D., 55e-56.
what it is that she is expert in. The expert, but not the dabbler, can explain why she is doing what she is doing: instead of being reduced to saying that “it feels right this way,” she can explain why this is, here and now, the appropriate thing to do in these circumstances. What such an explanation will look like will of course vary with the skill in question: “You have to use the subjunctive here because...,” “You can’t have the electricity line going there because...,” and “You need to steer the boat to the right here because...” all appeal to different kinds of considerations, but what is being appealed to is the understanding which the expert has of French, electricity, or navigation.30

LaBarge claims that what “...distinguishes a mere knack from genuine expertise in the Gorgias is the ‘rational understanding’ which the expert has of the nature of his subject matter, an understanding which enables him to explain why things happen as they do (Gorgias 465a, 500e-501a).”31

I think the Platonic position as described by LaBarge should follow for an intellectual kind of expertise. I go on to define throughout the remainder of this chapter what I mean by intellectual expertise, as I do the thesis.32

1.5) Account Giving

When Plato has Socrates talk of being able to give an account, he has a special kind of account in mind. Irwin describes what kind of account Plato is after in the following:

32 For information regarding the relationship between intellectual expertise and teaching, see the section entitled ‘Teachability’ in the appendix.
The conditions of adequacy for a dialectical account will be the same as usual; it must explain, and, as far as possible, justify, the beliefs under examination, by reference to some general teleological principles. These were the normal conditions for success in moral inquiries.

In the *Republic* Plato extends his demand beyond ethics; intelligence should find the kind of teleological account of all reality which was his first preference in the *Phaedo*. Such an account... would be analogous to the relation of virtues to the good, because our account of each aspect of reality would be tested by showing how it contributes to some systematic theory presenting all reality as a whole, a single, coherent teleological system. The general theory will be the first principles justifying hypotheses, showing how they fit in the teleological account, and at the same time itself justified by the best synoptic account... of the hypotheses. This form of justification, normal for any dialectical account, is circular, but not clearly vicious; no other form is recognised in the *Republic*.\(^{33}\)

I will adopt Plato’s requirement of account giving for craft knowledge, as a requirement for intellectual expertise. However I will not adopt the specific type of account that Plato was interested in. Moreover, I will not adopt Plato’s disdain towards what he termed ‘knacks’. Instead I will say that there are experts who can give an account. There may be experts who cannot give an account. I do not say that in order to be an expert in general one must be able to give an account. I say that in order to qualify as an *intellectual* expert, one must be able to give an account. However, intellectual expertise is not merely a matter of knowing that any particular X is the case. Being able to offer an account for why X is the case is what exemplifies intellectual expertise. Unlike Plato, I will simply say that the particular

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kind of account that is required of intellectual expertise is either a teleological or causal account, or perhaps both; the kind of account required will likely vary by domain and question. By tying intellectual expertise to this kind of account giving, we tie intellectual expertise to that which is typically regarded as theoretical.

One immediate objection is that Plato’s craft expertise does not always correspond to what we would thematically call intellectual expertise. Annas uses the example of an electrician as exemplifying craft knowledge, yet it may be unclear to some that electricians could really qualify as intellectual experts; electricians do not seem to fit in thematically as exemplifying intellectual expertise.

My response to this is simple. Intellectual experts are able to offer propositional accounts for why something is the case. This propositional account is either causal or teleological. There can be intellectual expertise across a plethora of domains, and not merely those traditionally intellectual or theoretical subjects like chemistry, physics or biology, to name just a few. As such, the thematic objection is misplaced. If that electrician is able to offer a teleological or causal explanation for why a certain state of affairs falling within their respective domain is the case, I say that other things equal they at least have a case for intellectual expertise. Likewise I count Selinger’s expert in farming as an intellectual expert. The actual day to day acts involved in the running of a farm may in many cases not seem like an intellectual exercise. However, I would call attention to Selinger’s statement once more: “An expert “in farming” could effectively communicate, coordinate, and
synthesize accurate propositional information about farming—could become secretary of agriculture—even if terrified of plows and tractors.”

I reject limiting the domains open to intellectual expertise to domains that thematically fit the term ‘intellectual’. However, it is worth noting that intellectual experts may find themselves offering second order or higher order reasons for why something is the case: there could be a point when a golf coach may need to be appealing to the physics of a golf swing. Likewise there may come a point when, if pushed far enough, a chef would come to rely on the domain of physics, biology or chemistry when offering an explanation for the development of a flavour in a certain dish. One of the common factors in each of these cases is an appeal to a fundamental subject; physics, biology chemistry, and the like. While there can be no doubt that these domains are often domains in which intellectual expertise is exemplified, it is not exclusively to these domains that intellectual expertise is bound.

A final consideration remains, and that is to say that not all domains may easily lend themselves towards intellectual expertise. One classic example is riding a bike. There may be lots of accessible information about bikes, but when it comes to actually riding a bike, this is typically thought to pertain to know-how, rather than know-that. This poses no problem. We will simply note that certain domains lend themselves better towards intellectual expertise than some others. Likewise, certain domains may well lend themselves better to intellectual expertise than non-intellectual expertise, nuclear physics presumably being one among many such domains.

In this chapter I have provided a distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise. I firstly reviewed what initially seemed to be a distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise. Goldman referred to these to these two categories as cognitive and skill expertise respectively. However I concluded that the distinction was remarkably thin. Both Goldman’s cognitive expertise seemed to involve much in the way of skill expertise, and skill expertise seemed to bleed heavily into cognitive expertise; at the very least, it was not clear that Goldman’s distinction was sharp enough to be of use. This was demonstrated through the use of the billiards player example: billiard players seem to know-how to take a good shot, but also need to know the rules of the game. A shot would not be good if it was illegal. A good shot presupposes the kind of propositional information that more clearly applied to Goldman’s cognitive expert. The same applied with the golfer; the golfer knows how to swing the club in this situation, but yet again needs to know the rules of the game. Goldman admits his distinction is not sharp.

Next I reviewed an argument from Dreyfus and Dreyfus to the effect that all expertise was a matter of experience and intuition. There is some empirical evidence to support the view that much of what constitutes expertise in chess is something like intuition built on experience. However, contrary to the argument put forward by Dreyfus and Dreyfus, there is also empirical evidence to support the view that critical analytic reflection may significantly improve upon performance. This limits the view that expertise is a matter of experience, intuition and nothing.
else. Further, I suggest that the Dreyfus conception of expertise need not be outright rejected, but simply limited: there is no doubt that when certain experts perform, such as a racing driver, they will rarely ‘fall back’ on rule following in order to guide their performance when actually performing. As such, the Dreyfus conception of expertise as intuition built on experience seems to fit well with certain types of expert performance. But it clearly does not work for everything. There are also domains which seem to rely far more on the possession of propositional information than racing drivers or actors do: scientists and perhaps historians demonstrate this.

Lastly I looked to the Platonic notion of account giving to provide a foundation for a distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise. Plato’s distinction between knacks and crafts was brought to the fore here, and while I did not adopt the strict Platonic version of what an account ought to look like, I did adopt the more general principle that intellectual expertise is an account giving type of expertise. The particular type of account should be either causal or teleological in nature, or perhaps at times both. Additionally it will be propositional in nature. What’s more, the term ‘intellectual’ should not be used to limit the scope of intellectual expertise to domains which are characteristically thought of as theoretical, or non-practical.

In the next chapter I ask one very central question: do the accounts which constitute the expertise of the intellectual expert need to be true? That is, is knowledge a prerequisite of intellectual expertise?
Chapter 2: The Problem with Knowledge

If intellectual expertise is an account giving type of expertise, what characteristics will these accounts have? Will these accounts need to be true in order to be constitutive of intellectual expertise? Some might suppose that the possession of large quantities of knowledge is a prerequisite of intellectual expertise. Many intuitively believe that Intellectual expertise is a matter of possessing large quantities of knowledge.¹ Some will regard the link between intellectual expertise and knowledge as obvious. For a conscientious philosopher, this obviousness is worrying.

To claim that someone could be an intellectual expert despite not having any knowledge whatsoever would seriously buck a historical trend: no doubt it is a claim that may well spark controversy. However, it is for exactly this controversial position that I argue. In this chapter I argue that intellectual expertise does not necessarily consist in or presuppose knowledge of any quantity: I argue that an individual could be an intellectual expert without any propositional knowledge whatsoever. However, I do not argue that intellectual experts cannot have knowledge, or that knowledge is impossible to obtain. Moreover, I do not argue that the possession of knowledge would disqualify one as an intellectual expert. Nevertheless, I do argue that knowledge is not a useful concept for understanding the nature of intellectual expertise.

¹ Why the possession of large quantities of knowledge, rather than just some knowledge? Typically we believe that experts qualify as experts, not because they know one or two things, but lots of things within any particular domain. However, the account of intellectual expertise I provide will not presume the possession of any knowledge.
I start with a clarification of what I understand by my use of the terms and expressions knowledge, truth and ‘intellectual expertise constituting belief’. I then argue that if intellectual expertise is constituted by knowledge, as it is on the traditional view of what makes an expert an expert, then intellectual experts must be infallible on those propositions which constitute their intellectual expertise.

Next I proceed to show the burden on any account of expertise that is constituted by knowledge. There are four problems I outline: the historical problem, the denial problem, the vacuousness problem, and the expert disagreement problem. On the basis of these burdens, I finally argue that any coherent, robust account of intellectual expertise will do well to steer clear of presupposing the possession of knowledge.

I consider two objections to the position I defend. The first concerns ‘pockets of ignorance’. The ‘pockets of ignorance’ objection is that experts need not know everything about a particular topic to qualify as experts. As such, these pockets of ignorance explain how it is experts, intellectual or otherwise, can possess knowledge about a topic, but still make mistakes. I argue that the pockets of ignorance objection is misplaced: someone who wishes to save the traditional account of intellectual expertise, according to which intellectual expertise presupposes knowledge, cannot do so by arguing that intellectual experts need not know everything. My argument focuses entirely on those propositions that do constitute the intellectual expertise of the expert, not those that do not.

\[2^2\text{ The historical and denial problem appear together within the same section. By contrast, the vacuousness and expert disagreement problem are each presented separately.}\]
I then consider the claim that without robust criteria for intellectual expertise, that there are two unsavoury consequences: the first among these is that there may be many more intellectual experts than we had previously supposed. The second is that intellectual expertise may be a largely trivial matter. I counter these problems by arguing that knowledge is not the only robust epistemic standard available to epistemologists. Moreover, as I discuss in chapter 4, I see no reason to insist that intellectual expertise must be necessarily esoteric in nature.

With these considerations in mind, I point out the direction which the first two chapters, taken together, suggest for a sensible theory of intellectual expertise.

2.1) Knowledge and Intellectual Expertise Constituting Beliefs

As I outlined in the first chapter, philosophers distinguish between different types of knowledge. One such distinction is between knowing how and knowing that. Know-how was defined as a disposition or ability. Know-that was defined as propositional. Traditionally, many analytic philosophers working within the philosophy of expertise have held that A knows that P if and only if (1) P is true, (2) A believes that P, and (3) A’s belief that P is appropriately justified. Justified true belief is often referred to as the strong sense of knowledge. The kind of justification typically required is epistemic in nature.

However some philosophers forgo the requirement of justification, and hold that mere true belief is enough for knowledge. Mere true belief is referred to as the weak sense of knowledge. This weak sense is referenced by Goldman and Olsson when discussing an example used by Hawthorne:
If I ask you how many people in the room know that Vienna is the capital of Austria, you will tally up the number of people in the room who possess the information that Vienna is the capital of Austria. Everyone in the room who possesses the information counts as knowing the fact; everybody else in the room is ignorant of it. It doesn’t really matter, in this context, where someone apprised of the information got it. Even if they received the information from somebody they knew who wasn’t trustworthy, they would still be counted as cognizant of the fact, that is, as knowing it rather than as being unaware of it.3

Goldman also uses this weaker sense of knowledge when he claims that “…an expert in a field is someone who has (comparatively) extensive knowledge (in the weak sense of knowledge, i.e., true belief) of the state of the evidence, and knowledge of the opinions and reactions to that evidence by prominent workers in the field.”4

For my purposes, knowledge can be understood in either the strong or weak sense. There will be no cause within this chapter to distinguish between the two. This is because both strong and weak senses of knowledge require that a proposition is true in order for that proposition to count as an instance of knowledge. All I require of the definition of knowledge is propositional true belief. Thus following the precedent set within the tradition of the philosophy of expertise, I will understand knowledge throughout this chapter, and indeed throughout the whole thesis, unless otherwise noted, to mean justified true belief (or if you prefer,


merely true belief). Moreover, I take a belief to be true when the belief in question corresponds to reality.\footnote{Throughout this thesis I work within a correspondence theory of truth framework. There is however nothing in principal that should stop my theory of intellectual expertise, as outlined throughout this thesis, from advancing inside other popular truth frameworks. In particular, I have in mind the coherence theory of truth.}

Next I introduce the expression ‘intellectual expertise constituting belief’. By intellectual expertise constituting belief, I mean a propositional account giving belief which counts towards the intellectual expertise of any given individual. As such, the position I argue for in this chapter could be presented in two separate claims: the first claim is that truth is not a prerequisite of an intellectual expertise constituting belief. That is a proposition can be fully constitutive of intellectual expertise without being true. The second is that intellectual expertise does not presuppose the possession of any true intellectual expertise constituting beliefs.

\section*{2.2) Intellectual Expertise, Fellow Experts, and Society}

There will be questions concerning what counts as an intellectual expertise constituting belief. To restate Goldman’s position, a cognitive expert is “…someone who has (comparatively) extensive knowledge (in the weak sense of knowledge, i.e., true belief) of the state of the evidence, and knowledge of the opinions and reactions to that evidence by prominent workers in the field.”\footnote{Goldman, A., (2001), Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust, \textit{Philosophy and Phenomenological Research}, 63:1, 92.} I presume that by state of evidence Goldman means knowledge of those positions which are generally supported or endorsed in the literature. Additionally known, is what any such given evidence may imply.
In this chapter I shall focus on beliefs concerning the subject itself. By beliefs concerning the subject itself, I mean beliefs directly pertaining to the discipline in question, rather than say, beliefs about what others think about the discipline. For example, a chemist understanding that an atom is made up of neutrons, electrons and protons pertains to the subject itself. Evidence implying that atoms consist in neutrons, electrons and protons concerns the subject itself. By contrast, my beliefs regarding what a fellow academic believes about the make-up of atoms do not directly concern the subject itself.

Beliefs concerning the subject itself are necessary for intellectual expertise, and the quantity of such beliefs necessary for intellectual expertise qualification cannot be trivial. An awareness of the positions taken by other researchers in the field may also contribute in a significant way towards one’s status as an intellectual expert. Goldman outlines a similar distinction in his *Pathways to Knowledge*, where he states that:

Here it will be useful to distinguish between primary and secondary judgements within a given subject matter. In the literary domain, for example, a statement of the form “Novel N expresses truth T” is a primary statement. A corresponding secondary statement would be “Commentator Bernstein says that novel N expresses truth T.” A literature teacher who is herself uncertain about the cognitive status of the literature might not be prepared to assert primary statements in this domain, but she could comfortably assert secondary statements, many of which would be uncontroversially true.

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7 Chapter 4 is entirely dedicated to discussing intellectual expertise qualification in terms of the quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs required for intellectual expertise.  
Later, again concerning his distinction between primary and secondary judgements, Goldman states that:

In the sciences, primary judgements are the scientific hypotheses that serve as the focal targets of the investigation. The truth-value of these hypotheses are indeed difficult to determine. Today’s experimental findings often defeat those of yesterday, suggesting different truth-values for hypotheses than those previously assigned... Secondary judgements would include statements describing the pieces of evidence and arguments thus far accumulated that bear on a given hypothesis, for example, the experimental results or the theoretical considerations that tilt for or against it.  

Goldman’s parlour does seem to match mine. This is despite the fact I say that questions about what the evidence concerns, concerns the subject itself, while Goldman labels such information secondary. Goldman broadly states that intellectual experts must possess knowledge concerning secondary matters:

At a minimum such secondary propositions are things that authorities in the field will know, even if they don’t know the truth-value of the hypotheses itself.

Secondary propositions of this sort are propositions on which experts will

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10 Some may question whether or not there is a split between Goldman’s language and my own. I suspect that one difference here is due to approach. One of Goldman’s more famous philosophical theses is that of reliabilism. Reliabilism in epistemology is the position that a belief is epistemically justified when it is produced by a reliable process. A consequence of the reliabilist position is that a belief can be justified even when little or no evidence for that belief is possessed by the believing agent. On the reliabilists account, a belief can be justified even when one is not aware of the process by which one acquired the belief. What matters is that the process is in fact a reliable process. The emphasis for reliabilists, and more broadly speaking externalists, is on the process by which one came to have a certain belief and not one’s awareness of the process itself. This, I suspect, is at least part of the reason for why Goldman labels beliefs concerning the evidence secondary. By contrast the position I adopt throughout the thesis is internalist in nature. Internalist’s, unlike externalists, typically insist that someone be aware of or acquainted with what it is that justifies their beliefs. For instance, what the agent in question regards as appropriate evidence. Consequently, for internalist’s, the evidence is not a ‘secondary’ matter.
commonly agree, and on which candidates for doctorates in the field will be examined. Similarly, in a field like philosophy one would be hard pressed to show that professors in the field know the truth about primary theses such as nominalism in metaphysics, contractarianism in political philosophy, or reductionism in the philosophy of mind. Surely they do know, however, the reasons adduced by various philosophers for and against these primary theses. Propositions describing these reasons (and the persons who advanced them) comprise the secondary judgements of the field. Substantially accurate knowledge of such secondary propositions is a feature that does distinguish professors from philosophical neophytes. To acquire credentials in philosophy, one must demonstrate knowledge—true belief—of suitable secondary propositions. Ph.D. candidates who commit serious errors in attributing positions and rationales for positions to historical or contemporary philosophers will find it hard to obtain their degrees. In general, then, there is a range of facts about which academics must have (veritistic) knowledge to qualify as experts, and those without training in the field will typically lack knowledge. So a crucial knowledge difference distinguishes members of academic communities from nonmembers.¹¹

Goldman does not reference intellectual experts specifically, but it is not clear that intellectual experts are not to be included. Moreover, intellectual expertise does seem to be an appropriate kind of expertise given what it is that Goldman states.

However, it is my contention that intellectual expertise does not necessarily require knowledge of opinions and reactions to evidence by anyone else in the field. If this was the case, then the possibility of intellectual expertise could be

defeated by the absence of any other prominent workers in the field. There would be no prominent workers or researchers to *know* the beliefs of.

There are a couple of intuition pumping questions and thought experiments which seem to indicate that the existence of other intellectual experts is unnecessary for intellectual expertise. For example, would Newton’s theories have been any less constitutive of intellectual expertise due to an absence of other workers or researchers in the field? A second situation we can imagine is an intellectual expert from current times travelling via a time machine to prehistoric times. In this prehistoric time, any intellectual expert that has travelled back would not have any peers or contemporaries. However, the absence of peers or contemporaries does not clearly diminish the time-travelling scientists claim to intellectual expertise. Lastly, would a scientist who had been locked in a laboratory for the past two decades, completely cut off from all ongoing research around him (but left to his or her own devices to research) be necessarily cut off from his or her status as an intellectual expert? What if that lone research scientist had made some major discovery: for example, a cure for cancer? It is not clear that knowledge of the opinions and reactions of one’s contemporaries is necessary for intellectual expertise, even if knowledge of such reactions and opinions is typically possessed by intellectual experts.

My position is that the absence of social interaction cannot automatically defeat a case for intellectual expertise. The Cambridge changes utilised in the thought experiments above demonstrate that intellectual expertise is not necessarily social in nature. By this I mean that intellectual expertise does not require that other experts exist. So my position is that qualification as an
intellectual expert cannot depend upon the existence of either others or peers, our awareness of their existence, or indeed, knowledge about their views.

Some might think this claim too quick. What can we say to those who are disquieted by my claim that intellectual expertise is not necessarily social? What we can say is that my theory of intellectual expertise is not essentially non-social: the theory can and will be able to accommodate for both an essentially and non-essentially social understanding of intellectual expertise. There is nothing about the theory of intellectual expertise, which I am in the process of arguing for, which necessitates either a social or indeed non-social nature. I present my theory of intellectual expertise as non-essentially social to avoid the kind of Cambridge change problems just outlined. I think that a non-essentially social theory encounters fewer problems.

However, because I do not regard the social element as necessary, when I speak of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs, I will focus on the intellectual expert’s beliefs regarding what I term the subject itself: this includes the state of evidence, and the implications of the evidence. I will not concern myself in this chapter with views that do not regard the subject itself.

It should be noted that there is no contention between what I suggest in this chapter, and the fact that it is characteristically the case, in modern times, that an awareness of the beliefs of other researchers does often meaningfully count towards one’s status as an intellectual expert. I do not mean to demean such knowledge, or to cast doubt upon it.

12 In chapter 3 I speak in greater detail about motivations and reasons for keeping intellectual expertise primarily ‘ego-centric’ rather than ‘socio-centric’. However there is no principle, outside of problem avoidance, preventing me adopting a sociocentric rather than egocentric position. My theory of intellectual expertise can accommodate for either.
Finally, all further claims I make in this chapter regarding intellectual expertise and intellectual expertise constituting beliefs will be, unless otherwise noted in the text, both specific and limited to intellectual expertise.

2.3) Knowledge, Truth and Infallibility

To recap, on the traditional view intellectual expertise presupposes knowledge. I take a single instance of knowledge to be a single justified true belief. A large quantity of knowledge is a large quantity of justified true beliefs. Thus intellectual expertise presupposes a large quantity of beliefs which are not mistaken. I have stated that a belief is mistaken when it fails to correspond to reality. As such, a belief which is constitutive of intellectual expertise is a belief which is true, and as such does correspond to reality. Intellectual expertise presupposes many intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. I call this collection of positions the traditional view.

Platonic philosophy, broadly conceived, is largely in favour of this traditional view. LaBarge notes that Socrates at *Euthydemus* 280a claims “...that wisdom is the same thing as good luck, arguing that “In every walk of life... wisdom causes luck: wisdom can never fail at all, but must be successful and attain its goal. Otherwise it would no longer be wisdom.” After a few more examples from *Laches* 183c and *Charmides* 172a, La Barge claims that “it is clear enough from these passages that

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13 Throughout my thesis I proceed with correspondence theory of truth. However, there is in principle no danger for my theory of intellectual expertise in adopting an alternative popular theory of truth, namely the coherence theory of truth.

success is a critical element in expertise...”\textsuperscript{15} Where the so called wisdom is incorrect, it is no longer wisdom. Expertise requires the utmost correctness (truth), otherwise it is no longer expertise.

The requirement of utmost correctness implies that beliefs which are not true cannot constitute wisdom. The only kind of belief which could be constitutive of expertise, or wisdom, is a belief which is true.\textsuperscript{16} If the belief in question was not true, it wouldn’t be known. If the beliefs in question are not known, then they cannot be constitutive of intellectual expertise. As such, on that which constitutes the intellectual expertise of the expert (knowledge), the expert cannot be mistaken. This consequence—that the expertise of an intellectual expert is constituted by infallible beliefs —and the further knock-on effects will be the focus of this chapter.

But firstly, some might believe that this kind of thinking is just an irrelevant throw back to Platonic philosophy. But this is not so. Goldman thinks it noteworthy enough to mention that, as he sees it, experts can have mistaken beliefs within their domain of expertise: “[E]xperts in a given domain have more beliefs (or higher degrees of belief) in true propositions and/or fewer beliefs in false propositions within that domain than most people do.”\textsuperscript{17} From this quote alone, it may seem as though Goldman is open to the possibility that there may be experts who do not possess any knowledge. However, Goldman does not actually accept this, and clarifies his view when he states that:

\textsuperscript{16} Following LaBarge, I take the term wisdom in the Platonic parlour to be a matter of expertise.
If the vast majority of people are full of false beliefs in a domain and Jones exceeds them slightly by not succumbing to a few falsehoods that are widely shared, that still does not make him an "expert" (from a God's-eye point of view). To qualify as a cognitive expert, a person must possess a substantial body of truths in the target domain.\textsuperscript{18}

More recently Gesang claimed that “[w]e call people expert in the ‘strong sense’ if their judgements are correct... for the right reasons.”\textsuperscript{19} The view that intellectual expertise requires substantial quantities of knowledge, by which is implied a substantial number of true propositions, is still endorsed.

It is however my contention that an implication of the traditional account of intellectual expertise is that intellectual experts are not mistaken on those beliefs which constitute their intellectual expertise. This contention is not an irrelevant throwback to Plato. After all, mistaken beliefs cannot be known. If the possession of knowledge is prerequisite of intellectual expertise, as is held following the traditional account, then it follows that intellectual experts are not mistaken on those propositions which constitute their intellectual expertise. As such, on the traditional account of intellectual expertise, those beliefs which constitute expertise are true.

Some have cast doubt about their commitment to the traditional account. For instance, Hardwig sees fit to mention that his use of the term expert “does not

presuppose or entail the truth of the experts’ views.” In fact, Hardwig goes further:

If one defines ‘expert’ in terms of the truth of his views (as Plato’s Gorgias and Thrasymachus do), it is often impossible in principle to say who is an expert—even if one is an expert oneself!—since it is often impossible to say whose view is coincident with the truth. But I submit that it is not similarly impossible to say what constitutes sustained, relevant inquiry and to ascertain who is engaged in it (though there will sometimes be very real problems in making this judgment). And whenever sustained inquiry is both necessary for and efficacious with respect to determining whether or not p, the expert’s views are less likely to be mistaken and likely to be less mistaken than an inexpert opinion. Thus, in my use of ‘expert’, the connection between truth and the views of the expert is not completely severed, though that connection is neither necessary nor simple.

As I have just explained, the traditional account implies the infallibility of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. This, so I argue below, gives rise to the doubt that expertise consists in the possession of knowledge. This doubt is based on the consequences of the traditional account of intellectual expertise. One such consequence is that it may force us to revise the use of our language, and consider far more carefully who really should be called an intellectual expert. Why? Because it is hard to believe that those whom might pre-reflectively have been thought of as intellectual experts, each had some vast quantity of true intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. In particular, I have in mind the legions of past intellectual experts from previous generations and eras, such as Aristotle or

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Rocky Webb
Newton. Can it really be maintained that the beliefs they held regarding the subject itself and the implications of their evidence were largely true, or if you prefer, were not mistaken? Can this be held for all past intellectual experts to whom the label of intellectual expert might straightforwardly, pre-reflectively apply? The answer is no.

Many past scientists have held beliefs concerning the subject itself which we now consider to be mistaken. This is uncontroversial, and can be used as an argument against intellectual expertise presupposing knowledge. This argument is particularly potent when considering any domain which can be characterised as either ‘moving forward’ and/or debunking past mistakes. Goldman acknowledges this when he states that:

In the sciences, primary judgements are the scientific hypotheses that serve as the focal targets of investigation. The truth-values of these hypotheses are indeed difficult to determine. Today’s experimental findings often defeat those of yesterday, suggesting different truth-values for the hypotheses than the ones previously assigned.\(^{22}\)

I will now argue that the traditional view of intellectual expertise, according to which intellectual expertise consists in or presupposes knowledge, is so problematic that it might outright deny the existence of, even if not the possibility of intellectual expertise.

2.4) The Problem of Knowledge

The traditional view is that intellectual expertise presupposes knowledge. Knowledge in turn implies the truth of the propositions which constitute the intellectual expertise of the intellectual expert. On this view, intellectual experts possess a substantial numbers of truths, specific to a certain domain. These beliefs cannot be mistaken. Consequently the traditional view has at least four distinct problems: it may be the case that each one of these four problems alone provides motivation enough to revise our understanding of what constitutes intellectual expertise. What is almost certainly the case however is that all four problems taken together do provide us with sufficient motivation to revise our understanding of what constitutes intellectual expertise.

2.4.1) History and Denial

Are experts from previous eras in history really experts? Is it accurate to think of Aristotle or Newton as an intellectual expert? Given that Newtonian physics and Aristotelian science have been broadly discredited, many of Aristotle’s or Newton’s so called intellectual expertise constituting beliefs within these domains cannot have been true, and thus cannot have been known. Consequently, Aristotle and Newton cannot have had as much knowledge as might normally be presupposed, and thus may have never have counted as an intellectual expert within these domains. We might note that a great many more past intellectual experts may be in this position. How then are we to think of intellectual experts from the past?
An immediate but faulty response to this concern is to say that while Aristotle and Newton used to be intellectual experts, they no longer are. The reason such a response is faulty is because it fails to understand the problem. If the possession of substantial sums of knowledge is a prerequisite of intellectual expertise, and Aristotle and Newton failed to obtain said substantial quantities of knowledge, then it is not the case that Aristotle and Newton were experts, but that Aristotle and Newton never achieved intellectual expertise in the first place. 23

An alternative strategy could be to claim that those few true beliefs which Aristotle and Newton did have were enough to allow them to count as intellectual experts back then. However this response automatically concedes that intellectual expertise is no longer necessarily a matter of having a great deal of knowledge. If in at least some instances one need not have a great deal of knowledge in order to count as an intellectual expert, then in what sense exactly does intellectual expertise presuppose a great deal of knowledge? By the lights of such a response, it would not.

Such a response however, might be bolstered with the claim that there are now some additional features or beliefs required for intellectual expertise which were not required then, but that are now. These might be more truths, different truths, alternative methods and so the list might go on, with each additional criterion attempting to account for the idea that each respective domain may have advanced, or indeed that qualification as an intellectual expert should now be more demanding than it once was. Some might endorse such a response due to its

23 On certain theories of truth, such as the coherence theory of truth, the illegitimacy of such a move is less clear.
compatibility with the idea that what counts as an intellectual expert constituting belief changes over time, from era to era or from society to society: that what counts as an intellectual expert constituting belief is largely relative and sociocentric. Some might think that even if Aristotle’s beliefs regarding physics or biology had been largely true, that someone with relevantly similar beliefs now still wouldn’t count as an intellectual expert. Some might think this is due to how comparatively simple such beliefs may be when measured against more modern accounts.

I respond to such questions and suggestions in the third and fourth chapter. In brief, I argue that appreciating the apparent sociocentricity of intellectual expertise is one of the keys to understanding it. However, I also argue that capturing that apparent sociocentricity does not necessitate either a primarily sociocentric account of intellectual expertise, with criteria that change given the society and era in question, or indeed an exclusively social conception of intellectual expertise.

Instead one could characterise intellectual expertise as being a matter possessing many nontrivial beliefs which are egocentrically epistemically rational given the information reasonably available. In which case, expertise is not primarily or exclusively sociocentric, but egocentric. There are obviously a lot of caveats, additions, and arguments to be made, and I make those throughout the thesis.

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\[24\] I talk at much greater length about such a conception of intellectual expertise as based in epistemic rationality in both the third and fourth chapter.
As such, my response to the idea that different beliefs have been constitutive of intellectual expertise at different times is simply to agree. They have. What may have been a belief constitutive of intellectual expertise in a bygone age may now be trivial, and as such, no longer constitutive of intellectual expertise. However, I do not agree that this must result in the use of differing criteria for each society or circumstance.²⁵

Moreover, we might note that a strategy which offers different criteria based on different eras, domains, and situations will fail to give an account of the nature of intellectual expertise as such. An account that articulates expertise as such is an account which unifies the several instances of intellectual expertise across domains, eras and societies. Since what I intend to outline is a flexible and robust theory of intellectual expertise, and not just ‘a’ theory appropriate for now, I will be offering an account which demonstrates what it is that our modern scientists and both Aristotle and Newton achieved which simultaneously qualifies them all as intellectual experts. To be an account of intellectual expertise throughout the ages, eras and across domains, the formal criteria for qualification cannot change. Presumably since vast quantities of knowledge was what both Newton and Aristotle lacked, any theory of intellectual expertise looking to accommodate for the situation of historical intellectual experts would not be able to rely upon the truth of the beliefs of the intellectual expert as a prerequisite of their intellectual expertise: or indeed, the possession of a vast quantity of true beliefs either.

²⁵What may change from era to era are the individual beliefs which constitute intellectual expertise, but not the formal criteria for qualification as an intellectual expert.
Consequently, the historical problem should give us cause to think about how we are to conceive of intellectual experts that were largely mistaken in their beliefs. Given that many alleged intellectual experts of the past were largely mistaken, as future generations seem to have a habit of showing, we cannot coherently think of these past intellectual experts as properly expert if we insist upon the truth of their views.\(^\text{26}\)

No doubt an answer favoured by some will be just to disenfranchise past alleged intellectual experts. If intellectual expertise presupposes knowledge, and presupposing knowledge implies the truth of a great many beliefs of the intellectual expert in question, then the vast majority of those past figures were just not intellectual experts. On this view, Aristotle, Newton and the like were just not intellectual experts.

Some might find no problem with this point of view. One might think we just have to bite the bullet and admit that neither Aristotle nor Newton were intellectual experts. On such a view one might claim that there is no problem with the view that intellectual expertise consists in knowledge; the problem is in thinking of Aristotle or Newton as intellectual experts. By the same token, one might think that ancient or medieval doctors were not experts, and it is just as simple as that. But I find this point of view unpalatable. This is not a bullet I want to bite. I want to be able to accurately refer to Aristotle or Newton or Darwin as an intellectual expert. This is for two reasons: The first reason is the desire to avoid such a dire

\(^{26}\) Another response in an attempt to keep truth and expertise joined together could involve appeals to verisimilitude. The idea being that so long as an expert moves a domain the right direction (where the right direction is one which moves towards the truth of a matter), they may enjoy status as an intellectual expert. I discuss verisimilitude and its relationship to intellectual expertise further throughout the thesis, but with greater focus in chapter 9.
revision in our use of language. The second reason concerns avoiding another related but perhaps more significant problem.

A natural corollary to the historical problem is what I term the denial problem. The denial problem is epistemological in nature. It may require us to think a bit more radically, but the conscientious philosopher cannot ignore it. If it is the case that as each new generation comes along, that this new generation shows the current understanding in any given domain to be incorrect, then we may often be forced to concede that the person we took to be an expert, perhaps from the previous generation, is in fact not an expert. The expert from the older generation did not in fact possess the knowledge required for intellectual expertise. But what would stop us thinking that these new intellectual experts would not again be refuted by the next younger generation’s so called intellectual experts? And couldn’t this problem just continue for all practical intents and purposes ad infinitum? Isn’t this, more or less, what has been happening throughout each of the scientific domains throughout the past several hundred years? This problem has found ground in the philosophy of science, and has been used to critique the scientific method as a method of reliable inquiry:

Consider again skeptical challenges of the scientific method. The history of science, it is sometimes argued, is largely a history of error. We look back at the theories of even the best scientists of previous times and find much in those theories that is false, and even silly. But there is no reason to think that future scientists won’t think the same of our best current theories. In this way, the history of science seems to give us good inductive grounds—grounds that are themselves acceptable,
given the methods of science—for thinking that the scientific method is unreliable.\textsuperscript{27}

It might be hard to imagine, but if intellectual expertise presupposes the truth of the intellectual expertise constituting beliefs, then we could have no intellectual experts among us, never had any intellectual experts among us, and indeed possibly never have any intellectual experts among us. If the past is anything to go by, this non-existence of intellectual expertise cannot be denied as a possibility. It could just so happen to be the case that our current scientists are largely incorrect. Their theories, no matter how epistemically rational—that is rational given the immediate goal of truth and the information available to the expert in question—could be incorrect.\textsuperscript{28} Even our greatest minds could largely have beliefs which are not true, and consequently not qualify as intellectually expert.

It might be a stretch to say that it is impossible to know any one truth about anything, but intellectual experts are not usually thought to qualify as experts on the basis of one truth. Normally intellectual expertise is thought to require the possession of an entire network of truths. It is not enough to merely know how many chairs are in the room. Neither is it enough for a heart surgeon to even have a handful of true beliefs about heart surgery. Other things equal, on the traditional view intellectual expertise requires vast quantities of knowledge, and this is likely a much harder feat to pull off.

\textsuperscript{27} Foley, R., (1993), \textit{Working Without a Net}, Oxford University Press, 76.
\textsuperscript{28} I offer a more complete definition of epistemic rationality in chapter 3. Needless to say that the account of epistemic rationality I adopt does not necessitate a link between epistemic rationality and truth.
Some might still be unconvinced for whatever reason that intellectual expertise presupposing knowledge is as problematic as all that. We might easily concede that the situation described above is a rather sceptical one. Moreover, some might just find it unimaginable that their car mechanic doesn’t have knowledge. Such people may think that the scepticism required in order to make the argument above work is overbearing. I think we can soften a few of these worries. One way is by noting that I have not suggested that intellectual experts cannot have knowledge. I have only claimed intellectual expertise does not presuppose knowledge. I argue this firstly because there seem to be instances of intellectual expertise without great quantities of knowledge, perhaps most obviously from historical figures.

However a second reason for my claim is that it cannot be entirely denied that future intellectual experts may show our current intellectual experts to be largely incorrect. Some might be tempted to go further. They may suggest that if the past is anything to go by that we can expect our current intellectual experts to be largely incorrect on many matters. This is not to say that the traditional view necessitates the non-existence of intellectual experts now or indeed in the past. Neither would any advocate of the traditional view need insist upon the impossibility of intellectual expertise at some point in the future.

Another way to soften the scepticism required is to restate that I am only questioning the truth status of beliefs which concern the subject itself. No one doubts, for example, the veracity of Aristotle’s beliefs about Platonic or Socratic philosophy. Nevertheless, on the traditional view one cannot conscientiously rule out the possibility of the non-existence of intellectual expertise. Moreover, there
are credible reasons for us to be dubious about the claim that a great many 
individuals have an intellectually expert qualifying quantity of true beliefs. 

A sober theory of intellectual expertise will, where possible, circumvent 
such problems. To circumvent these problems the theory of intellectual expertise I 
offer will not require that intellectual experts possess knowledge. In fact, in order 
to play it safe the theory of intellectual expertise I provide will not require that the 
expert possess any truths whatsoever.

2.4.2) Vacuousness

The vacuousness problem builds upon what has already been postulated in the 
description of the historical and denial problem. Let us suppose that it just so 
happens to be the case that the so called intellectual ‘experts’ of today do not 
possess knowledge, and as such are not expert proper. Let us further presume that 
the intellectual ‘experts’ of the past did not have the knowledge required to 
constitute intellectual expertise. In such a situation one might well wonder to 
whom the notion of intellectual expertise properly applies. In such a situation—a 
situation we might note is possible given the historical and denial problems noted 
above—at least in the case of intellectual expertise, the term ‘expert’ would be 
vacuous and non-referential.

Given the historical and denial problem, if intellectual expertise presupposes 
knowledge then it may be the case that the very notion of an intellectual type of 
expertise is essentially vacuous. Any notion of intellectual expertise which serves to 
render its own use non-referential, and thus hollow, is presumably a conception of
intellectual expertise which, if possible, is to be avoided. On the traditional view, for all intents and purposes, intellectual expertise may be no more interesting or useful a concept than that of the unicorn.

Moreover, a pursuit of the traditional view may ask of us a great revision in our use of the term ‘expert’. Where possible it may be best that we revise our understanding of expertise rather than our use of the term ‘expert’: especially when the revision may require a demotion in status for many alleged intellectual experts. Any so called experts who were considered intellectual experts on the basis of beliefs which were not true would be demoted. This does not tell us whom we are supposed to demote, but this is a separate issue.29 As such, the theory of intellectual expertise offered here will endeavour to offer a conception of expertise which is neither vacuous nor non-referential. Further, an aim of my theory of intellectual expertise will be to provide an account which fits with our typical use of the notion of intellectual expertise and to whom it applies. As such, we will endeavour not to demote and promote at whim those to whom the term ‘expert’ would not straightforwardly imply.

2.4.3) Expert Disagreement

Expert disagreement is a different issue from peer disagreement. The questions concerning peer disagreement focus on the ‘uniqueness thesis,’ a thesis which I discuss in the fifth chapter. Peer disagreement concerns whether or not two peers

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can both hold epistemically rational positions when they disagree, given only one pool of information. In turn, questions concerning peer disagreement relate to discussions of epistemic absolutism and epistemic relativism. I discuss these issues in chapter 5.

Expert disagreement concerns whether two experts can simultaneously have true but conflicting intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. As such, the expert disagreement problem turns on issues concerning of the social construction of truth, “…universality, objectivity and mind independence.”[^30] I presume an absolutist account of truth, where if God exists then there is no existence ‘for me’ or ‘for you’, but where the sentence simply stops at ‘God exists’. As I see things, there is no need to specify who something is true for. Moreover, since the expert disagreement problem concerns the impossibility of two conflicting true views, it makes no direct mention to epistemic rationality.

On the traditional view intellectual expertise is constituted by the possession of true beliefs. These intellectual expertise constituting beliefs cannot be mistaken. Presumably then two intellectual experts operating within the same narrow domain would not disagree were they to compare their expertise constituting beliefs. In fact if their expertise constituting beliefs must be true—and on the traditional account they must—then it is necessarily the case that the two experts in question could not disagree regarding those same expertise constituting beliefs.

To make this point clear, let us consider an example. Let us imagine that P is the case. Let us also imagine that we have two intellectual experts considering the

proposition that P. For the proposition P to be an intellectual expertise constituting belief it would need to count as an instance of knowledge for the intellectual experts. This means the experts would need to believe P, be justified in believing P, and for P to be true. Both intellectual experts would need to *know* that P. If both experts know that P, they cannot in earnest disagree about the proposition ‘P’. For disagreement to occur, one would have to hold that not-P: holding not-P means holding a belief which is not constitutive of intellectual expertise. As such, two intellectual experts cannot disagree about P and both have their belief regarding P be constitutive of their intellectual expertise.

Some might find the impossibility of expert disagreement regarding their intellectual expertise constituting beliefs problematic. Some will believe that expert disagreement on intellectual expertise constituting beliefs is straightforwardly possible. For some, the impossibility of expert disagreement on expertise constituting beliefs will count as a mark against the traditional account of expertise. As such, the theory of intellectual expertise offered here will endeavour to make possible expert disagreement on those very beliefs which constitute the expertise of the expert.

### 2.5) Two Objections

On the traditional view we need to deny that many past individuals were intellectual experts in any proper sense. Moreover, accepting the traditional view demands that we accept that any of our so called current intellectual experts may in fact not be experts. Further we would need to accept that the very notion of
intellectual expertise could be entirely vacuous and non-referential, no more real than the unicorn. Finally, we would need to hold that intellectual experts cannot disagree on those beliefs which constitute their expertise.

These are the consequences of the view that expertise presupposes knowledge. They are unacceptable. On this basis, it is clear that knowledge ought not to be a pre-requisite of intellectual expertise. One of the reasons for why these problems are particularly pressing is that many of us may reasonably believe that we live in an expertise saturated culture. Every day the press bombards with interviews, opinions, so called facts and statistics from this or that expert. Laypeople, which all of us are outside of our field(s) of expertise, are often confused by this myriad of information. What’s worse is that many of these so called experts appear to disagree with each other about these facts and statistics. Not only do these experts disagree about these facts and statistics, but they also disagree about the implications of any such facts and statistics.

There are two objections to the position I have taken which I will now outline. The first I call the pockets of ignorance objection; the second I call the deluge objection. The former concerns the possibility of intellectual experts making mistakes, and still retaining their expertise without jettisoning the claim that it is knowledge which constitutes their expertise. The latter concerns the sheer quantity of intellectual experts that may exist without a stringent criterion such as knowledge stemming the tide of expertise claims.
2.5.1) Pockets of Ignorance

Some believe it obvious that experts, intellectual or not, can make mistakes—have beliefs which are not true—irrespective of whether or not intellectual expertise presupposes the possession of vast quantities of knowledge. I share this belief.

The objection raised to the infallibility inference I claim, is that any given expert may have a ‘pocket of ignorance’. The pocket of ignorance objector will maintain that an expert can be an intellectual expert about N, where N stands for nuclear physics or some such domain, while not knowing all that there is to know about N. This may imply that an expert could make a mistake when operating within the domain of N—the domain which they possess intellectual expertise—despite having some vast sum of knowledge that falls within that domain. The reason for the mistake would be in some way related to the expert’s pocket of ignorance. The idea here is that the intellectual expert didn’t have all of the facts or some such thing. Accordingly, the only way error could definitely be avoided would be if the expert knew everything that there was to know about a certain topic, in this case N. This is clearly an unreasonable requirement for intellectual expertise qualification.

Earlier I quoted Goldman: Goldman claimed that an expert would have “...fewer beliefs in false propositions within that domain than most people do.”

But that an expert could have some false beliefs. Goldman’s position as quoted earlier is that an expert need not know all that there is to know within a certain domain in order to count as an expert. A physicist need not know everything about

physics. As such, that missing information or those false beliefs could lead to an intellectual expert making a mistake, or so this objection goes. I do not contest this point.

However if the aim of this pocket of ignorance objection is to render my argument null and void, then it completely misses its mark. The objection fails to rescue the traditional account of expertise, as constituted by knowledge, from the implicit infallibility of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. In fact, the traditional account of intellectual expertise and the claim that intellectual experts may have mistaken beliefs in their domain of expertise is consistent.

I have claimed that the traditional view implies the infallibility of the intellectual expert on those propositions which constitute the intellectual expertise of the expert. I did not say that the traditional view implied that the expert in question could not be mistaken on those beliefs which do not constitute the intellectual expertise of the expert. Unless the traditional account allows for expertise to be constituted by beliefs which are not known, this rescue attempt from the implicit infallibility of those beliefs which constitute the intellectual expertise of the intellectual expert will not work. Pockets of ignorance can account for the intellectual expert being mistaken regarding those beliefs which do not constitute the intellectual expertise of the expert. However, pockets of ignorance cannot explain how it is that an intellectual expert can simultaneously know and be mistaken upon a single proposition. On those propositions which constitute the intellectual expertise of the intellectual expert, the expert in question still cannot be mistaken.
An example will help to make this point clear. Imagine an intellectual expert car mechanic. It should be straightforwardly acceptable to say that the intellectual expert car mechanic need not know all that there is to know about each and every car that has existed, does exist, and will exist in order to count as an intellectual expert car mechanic. Such a demand would be unreasonable. As such, the mechanic will no doubt have many pockets of ignorance concerning the subject itself. Since the mechanic need not know all that there is to know about each and every car that has, does and will exist, it should be clear that the mechanic in question could make a mistake on that which directly pertains to his or her domain. Perhaps there is a new car that has just been released that the mechanic has not seen before. This new car could follow all of the relevant basic principles, yet initially throw the mechanic into having a few false beliefs, perhaps due to the way in which the engine was organised, or some such thing.

It should be clear from this example that on the traditional view of expertise, that the mechanic cannot be an expert on the basis of beliefs which he does not have, or beliefs which are mistaken. On the traditional account, what must constitute the intellectual expertise of the mechanic are those propositions which are known, or are true.

Thus the pocket of ignorance objection misses its mark. The pocket of ignorance objector takes the claim that knowledge implies infallibility of the intellectual expert on those beliefs which constitute the intellectual expertise of the intellectual expert, to be the general claim that intellectual experts cannot in any way, shape or form make a mistake within their relevant domain. But this is inaccurate. Experts can and do make mistakes even in their primary domain, as the
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intellectual expert mechanic example should make clear. What intellectual experts cannot do is be mistaken on those beliefs which constitute their intellectual expertise. Or at least this is the burden of any view of expertise which presupposes the possession of knowledge as constituting the expertise of the intellectual expert.

If the pocket of ignorance objection is used to say that intellectual experts can make mistakes on those propositions which the experts do not know, then the pockets of ignorance objection fails to deliver intellectual experts from the infallibility of the beliefs which are, on the traditional account, constitutive of intellectual expertise. If however a proponent of the pocket of ignorance objection wishes to maintain that one may have a justified true belief that P and be mistaken in that same belief that P then the pockets of ignorance objector will have to say something to deny what very much appears to be an immediately contradictory statement. Alternatively, and this is the path I propose below, one could simply stipulate that truth is not a prerequisite of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs.

To recap, the traditional account does not imply that intellectual experts are infallible in general. The traditional account implies that the beliefs which constitute the intellectual expertise of the intellectual expert are infallible. This fact, along with the claim that intellectual expertise is usually thought to be constituted by a great deal of knowledge—that is a vast sum of beliefs which are supposedly infallible, non-trivial, and that concern the subject itself—is all that my argument requires.
2.5.2) The Deluge Objection

Knowledge can be a useful criterion for rebutting any deluge of expertise claims. Knowledge after-all is a very stringent criterion. And without it, won’t we have too many experts? In turn, won’t it be too easy to be an expert?

My father has always professed to me that no one can ask for more than my best. That no one can ask for more than anyone’s best. Of course they can ask for more than my best; I could be asked to cycle a marathon during June, a time when typically my hay-fever is so bad as so that it causes me to suffer from severe asthma. Someone could ask. But my father’s point is probably better expressed as that no one can reasonably ask for more than one’s best. I think that asking Aristotle to have cracked quantum mechanics, provided, that is, quantum mechanics is actually correct (and of this there is no guarantee) is likely to be unreasonable. It would seem to ask for more than Aristotle’s best, given his epistemic facticity.

I take the requirement of knowledge for intellectual expertise to be the equivalent of asking me to cycle that marathon in June, or asking of Aristotle an understanding quantum mechanics; a man who pre-dates the theory of quantum mechanics by several millennia. The requirement of vast quantities of knowledge does a fine job of stemming the tide of expertise claims. The job is so finely done that it may stop all claims to expertise dead in their tracks. At least this is what is theoretically possible.

It is not problematic to say that at certain times in history, for certain domains, that there may not have been any intellectual experts. However, if we
treat knowledge as a prerequisite of intellectual expertise, we may be forced to take this denial of intellectual expertise further. It is one thing to disenfranchise one scientist, but another to start dismissing all those who failed to hold a large quantity of true, non-trivial, beliefs within a particular domain. Consequently, knowledge is a requirement too far: it is too stringent. As such, I do not accept the view that knowledge should be a pre-requisite of intellectual expertise on the basis that we may have too many experts without it.\textsuperscript{32}

An alternative strategy for retaining truth as an essential component of intellectual expertise may involve doubting that truth is essential to knowledge. So the idea here is that intellectual expertise entails knowledge, but that knowledge does not entail truth.

However doubting that truth should form a meaningful part of the definition of knowledge is not compelling. The reason the answer must come from an alternative understanding of intellectual expertise, and not knowledge, is because an alternative understanding of expertise is the least severe, or rather, least demanding of any change from the status-quo of traditional epistemology.

Moreover, knowledge defined as justified true belief plays a larger role within philosophy than the definition of intellectual expertise. Thus any serious challenges to the nature of knowledge will have a larger impact on the domain of philosophy as a whole, than will an alternative understanding of intellectual expertise.

Consequently, our first avenue of exploration should be to see if we can understand intellectual expertise in a coherent but different way: a way which

\textsuperscript{32} In chapter 4 I consider whether or not there is any sense to the claiming that expertise is necessarily an esoteric matter; whether experts need be thought of as representing some sort of elite body. I conclude against this notion.
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does not presuppose the truth of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs, and that
does not impact upon the nature of knowledge. This I suspect is ever-more
pressing given that other philosophers like Goldman and Hardwig have already
started to open up this avenue of exploration by doubting, not that knowledge
means justified true belief, but that expertise requires knowledge. The path
before us then will be to revise our understanding of intellectual expertise. In doing
this, we aim to circumvent the problems associated with presupposing the truth of
intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. If the above problems can in fact be
circumvented, and the theory of intellectual expertise that circumvents them
avoids any greater problems, it will be preferable to the traditional view.

2.6) Mapping a Solution

What would such a theory look like? Of the three traditional criteria of knowledge,
justification, truth and belief, only truth poses a problem for the traditional
understanding of intellectual expertise. Truth was the common agitator in each of
the four problems outlined above. One solution would be to jettison knowledge, or
rather, truth, from its status as a prerequisite of intellectual expertise. This leaves
intellectual expertise as being a matter of possessing large quantities of justified
beliefs.

There are broadly speaking two separate schools of thought regarding
justification: internalism and externalism, and I deal with these in the appendix

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One might wish to argue that our understanding of truth could be revised instead of expertise,
such that either truth is a matter of relativity or that the correspondence theory of truth is incorrect.
I have already committed myself to working inside a correspondence theory of truth framework,
though that’s not to say that the theory of intellectual expertise is essentially limited to such a
framework. Additionally I make some relevant points in both section 2.6 and chapter 5.
entry entitled ‘Internalism and Externalism’. For the sake of brevity, I will simply note that the theory of intellectual expertise I offer throughout this thesis falls into the internalism camp. Additionally, theories of justification also turn on epistemic absolutism and epistemic relativism, so I need to say something about this.

 Typically an epistemic absolutist will maintain that there is one uniquely correct epistemic system. Other things equal, beliefs are epistemically justified when one has correctly operated within that correct epistemic system.

 By contrast, a philosopher that holds a position of epistemic relativism towards epistemic justification denies that there are any objective principles by which one belief is ‘properly’ epistemically justified. As such, any particular epistemic system is just one among many ways of knowing the world, where each of these ways is “equally valid”.34 I pursue questions surrounding peer disagreement, epistemic absolutism and epistemic relativism in chapter 5. Additionally, the reader should note that issues concerning internalism and externalism presuppose a framework of epistemic absolutism. Under certain strains of epistemic relativism, there is no truth about what justifies what, so whether one meets externalist or internalist criteria for justification is largely irrelevant.

 Furthermore, one might be tempted to claim that there is no such thing as objective truth. Two ancient advocates of this kind of view would be Heraclitus, and Plato’s character Protagoras in the Theaetetus.35 A relativist might wonder why

35 The theories they offer usually go by the tag names of ‘all is flux’ and ‘man is the measure’.
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it is problematic to claim that what was true back then in Aristotle’s time is not true now.

If such a view were seriously pursued it would diminish the reasons I provide for rethinking the criteria of intellectual expertise, but not necessarily the theory itself: remember, the aim of my theory is to get by without truth at all.

My response to relativism about truth is relevantly similar to Feldman’s position regarding relativism and disagreement:

Relativists shy away from acknowledging that there really are disagreements. Relativists wonder why there must always be just one right answer to a question and they often say that while one proposition is “true for” one person or one group of people, different and incompatible propositions are “true for” others. I think of this view as “mindless relativism.” This sort of relativism is not at all unusual, and it may well be that some of my students had a response along these lines. These relativists think that somehow it can be that when you say that there is a God, you are right and when I say that there is not, I am right as well.

Appealing as it may be to some, this kind of relativism cannot be right. It is true that people on different sides of a debate do have their respective beliefs. But in many cases they really do disagree. They simply cannot both be right, even if we are not in a position to know who is right. To say that the different propositions are “true for” people on the different sides of the issue is just another way to say that they believe different things. It does not make the disagreement go away. 36

I will be working with a correspondence theory of truth framework. As such, I will not accept any sort of relativism when it comes to truth: which is to say I place

my theory of intellectual expertise within a framework of epistemic absolutism. I will however pursue an egocentric, internalist conception of epistemic justification.

2.7) Summary

In this chapter I have argued that any sensible theory of intellectual expertise cannot presuppose knowledge. I have understood knowledge to entail justified true belief. I argued that a belief does not have to be true to be constitutive of intellectual expertise. Intellectual expertise presupposes neither the truth of beliefs concerning what I have termed the ‘subject itself’, nor the truth of beliefs concerning the views of one’s peers. As such, intellectual expertise does not presuppose knowledge.

I argued that intellectual expertise cannot presuppose the possession of any true intellectual expertise constituting beliefs due to four unsavoury consequences: the first is the historical problem, which is that many individuals throughout history seem to have exuberated intellectual expertise, without having great quantities of beliefs that were true. The second is the denial problem, which uses the past absence of intellectual experts as a predictive model to cast doubt about the existence of present and future intellectual experts; if the past really is something to go by, we have serious cause to think carefully about whether there really are that many intellectual experts among us today. The third problem is that if intellectual experts really do not exist, then the term ‘expert’, at least in the case of intellectual expertise, is vacuous and non-referential. This would create a stark contrast to the expertise saturated society I describe throughout my thesis. The
fourth and last issue is the expert disagreement problem, which turns on the fact that intellectual experts, on the traditional view, cannot disagree on beliefs which constitute their intellectual expertise. I stated that any one of these problems may provide enough cause for us to revise our understanding of intellectual expertise: all four taken together certainly do.

One could respond in some cases by suggesting that intellectual experts are fallible due to their pockets of ignorance. This objection went that intellectual experts do not know everything that there is to know within a domain, and as such can make mistakes. However the pockets of ignorance objection misses the point. If being an intellectual expert is a matter of having, at least in part, a certain quantity of true beliefs, then being an intellectual expert is a matter of having a certain quantity of infallible beliefs. On these beliefs which actually constitute the expertise of the intellectual expert, the intellectual expert cannot be mistaken. This opens any conception of expertise that presupposes knowledge, to exactly those four epistemically unsavoury consequences described. Moreover, as I have discussed, there are robust standards aside from knowledge. Anyone who is worried about a deluge of expertise claims need not hold on to knowledge as a method to stem the tide.

As such, a revision of our understanding of intellectual expertise is necessary. Such a revision need only remove one requirement in order to bring back the possibility of intellectual expertise. That revision is to remove truth as a prerequisite of an intellectual expertise constituting belief. This is the position I have argued for. In the next chapter, I argue that we can understand intellectual
expertise as being a matter of being egocentrically epistemically rational, in light of the information reasonably available.
Chapter 3: Epistemic Rationality: The Structure of Intellectual Expertise

Chapters 1 and 2 have proved instructive: in the first chapter I drew a distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual expertise. I said that intellectual expertise could be understood as an account giving type of expertise. The type of accounts required for intellectual expertise will be either causal or teleological, or both. In the second chapter I argued that these accounts need not be known, which I understand to mean the accounts need not be true. I argued this for several reasons, the first of which I termed the historical problem. The historical problem concerned the fact that it is not always obvious that intellectual expertise is constituted by knowledge. This point becomes clear when using examples of past scientists such as Aristotle and Newton. But what then does constitute intellectual expertise? What can demand about the kind of account required of intellectual expertise, if not its truth?

One immediate worry is that ‘any old account’ will do: so long as it is causal or teleological, anything may count as constitutive of intellectual expertise. In this chapter, I demonstrate that we do not need to give this worry any weight at all. There are plenty of other rigorous standards for belief, even if truth as a standard is off the table. One such standard is that of epistemic rationality. The focus of this chapter will be on making use of the concept of epistemic rationality as the foundation of intellectual expertise. As such, this chapter will firstly explore the conception of epistemic rationality presented by Foley in his *The Theory of*
Epistemic Rationality. In utilising Foley’s theory, I will circumvent some objections for the use of a subjective foundationalist framework in my theory of intellectual expertise.¹ Throughout this chapter, but especially toward the first half of it, I outline much of the guts of the nature of intellectual expertise: I explain what is entailed by epistemic rationality. I explain why my theory of intellectual expertise is primarily an egocentric account rather than a sociocentric account. I explain how it is that the theory accommodates for intellectual revolutionaries. I even demonstrate how it is that the theory could accommodate for expert cavemen, were such a possibility to be appropriate.

With epistemic rationality outlined, I turn my focus to doxastic rationality. I explain its place within my theory of intellectual expertise. I will argue that the kind of account intellectual expertise presupposes is an account which is both epistemically and doxastically rational given the information available within or to any particular society in question.² This combination of epistemic and doxastic rationality is what Foley describes as a rich conception of epistemic rationality.

Finally, I explore the notions of responsible and non-negligent belief. I argue that the kind of account giving intellectual expertise presupposes does not require either non-negligent belief, epistemically responsible belief, or indeed responsible belief more generally. Ultimately, these concepts do not add much to what a rich

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¹ The defence of the subjective foundationalist framework focuses very specifically on its viability for use in my theory of intellectual expertise. As such, the defence firstly concerns how a subjective foundationalist account of intellectual expertise overcomes the problems I outline in chapter 2, and secondly the considerable job it does of avoiding other problems. As such, a defence of subjective foundationalism itself is not ventured in this essay. However, I do provide a brief account of the internalism and externalism debate in the appendix entry “Internalism and Externalism.”

² Doxastically rationality is not, strictly speaking, required: I use what Foley terms a rich conception of epistemic rationality as a surrogate here instead.
conception of egocentric epistemic rationality already provides. Additionally, such conditions tack on to my theory of intellectual expertise superfluous requirements.

3.1) Epistemic Rationality

When Foley claims that a proposition is epistemically rational, he means “…that it is epistemically rational for an individual to be persuaded of the truth of just those propositions that are the conclusions of arguments that he would regard as likely to be truth preserving were he to be reflective and that in addition have premises that he would uncover no good reason to be suspicious of were he to be reflective.”

Foley’s position is that it is epistemically rational for you to believe P as true when upon reflection P is the conclusion of arguments, or of an argument, that is uncontroversial for you to believe. Additionally, those same arguments which underlie P are themselves uncontroversial should they be reflected upon.

Schematically, Foley presents his position as:

A proposition P is epistemically rational for an individual S just if propositions that are uncontroversial for S to assume tend to make P epistemically rational for him and no other propositions that are uncontroversial for him to assume can be used to defeat the support that these propositions give P. The idea is that a proposition p is epistemically rational for a person just if either P is properly basic for him or P is made epistemically rational for him by other propositions that are properly basic for him.

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A position is ‘uncontroversial’ when there is an absence of any believed, subjectively good reason for an individual agent’s suspicion of the argument. A position or proposition P is ‘properly basic’ when that proposition or position does not depend on any other proposition or position for support; other things equal, it is what we might call fundamental.

To claim that a belief cannot be constitutive of intellectual expertise unless it is epistemically rational is, potentially, to insist upon a fairly rigorous standard. It is a standard which is appropriate given the desire to link intellectual expertise to justified belief, even if not justified true belief; knowledge.

Under this schema, an intellectual expertise constituting belief would need to be (1) believed by the individual in question, (2) supported by beliefs which are uncontroversial, and (3) undefeated by any assumable uncontroversial beliefs. For a well read, well versed, educated and specialised individual, for someone becoming of intellectual expertise in our current information age setting, this serves as a rigorous standard. But what of someone ill-read, unversed and ill-educated? Would the standard be rigorous for them? A thought experiment will help. Let us call such an ill-read, unversed and ill-educated individual person T. In order to truly epistemically deprave person T, relative to current times, let us also say that person T is a caveman. For person T, would epistemic rationality serve as a rigorous standard?
3.1.1) Experts alike: Cavemen and Scientists

It is right to raise this concern. The standard of epistemic rationality is a standard which is linked to both the intelligence, epistemic standards, beliefs and information possessed by the relevant individual. Where that individual possesses little in the way of intelligence and has mostly mistaken beliefs or misinformation, the standard of epistemic rationality may not feel or seem like a robust standard. Epistemic rationality may not appear to be a standard becoming of intellectual expertise in certain situations. However, this would be in spite of the fact that for person $T$, epistemic rationality is just as robust as it is for any other modern day western scientist.

The standard of epistemic rationality for both $T$ and information age scientist is one and the same across cases: it is formal in nature. Epistemic rationality requires (1) belief, (2) support by uncontroversial beliefs and (3) for any given belief to be undefeated by any other uncontroversial beliefs held (or that could be uncontroversially held in principal) by the individual in question. As such, if the standard would befit a modern day scientist it would also befit a caveman of the past.

It is not controversial for us to believe that in past societies, and perhaps even for some societies that exist now in relative isolation, that the standard of epistemic rationality is as demanding for them as it would be any modern day western scientist. Presumably, asking of cavemen evidence akin to that employed in modern scientific enquiry would be unreasonable in the extreme. When we judge

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5 Isolated societies such as those that live deep within the Amazonian Rainforest could serve as an example here.
how difficult or rigorous something is, we may wish to take into account the competencies and capabilities of those we are judging, given the information which is relevant to, reasonably available to, and attainable by, them. Foley believes that:

...when we are evaluating the decision of someone from a different culture, perhaps far removed from us both in time and place, it will often seem appropriate to adopt the decisions-maker’s egocentric perspective. Or short of this, it may seem appropriate to adopt a sociocentric perspective, whereby we evaluate the decision with respect to some standard that is relative to the community of the decision-maker. This perspective can be particularly attractive when the decision-maker belongs to a culture that we judge to be less advanced than our own. The method generally used in the decision-maker’s culture may not be the method that we now think is best. Indeed, it might even be that his or her method encountered difficulties that led to the development of ours. Even so, we may think that it is unfair to evaluate the decision in terms of our more sophisticated standards. After all, our method has not yet been developed.”

Taking this kind of approach is suitable given that the goal is to provide a theory of intellectual expertise which is able to characterise intellectual expertise across cultures and times. The answer then, is to bite the bullet and admit that if epistemic rationality is a standard becoming of intellectual expertise for the modern scientist, it should also be becoming too for cavemen.

Foley, R., (1993), *Working Without a Net*, Oxford University Press, 10
3.1.2) The Modern Caveman Problem

A related problem concerns how we are to think of person T, who achieves perfect epistemic rationality, but does so within a modern day society. Let us call this the modern caveman problem. Imagine that caveman T is teleported to our current, information age time. Can person T (our now modern caveman), despite being ill-read, unversed and ill-educated, still warrant his status as an intellectual expert, due exclusively to the sheer quantity of his epistemically rational beliefs? Could a belief be constitutive of intellectual expertise merely by virtue of being epistemically rational for the believing agent? Could this be so despite person T’s now comparatively desolate epistemic position? Desolate that is, compared to our modern societal standards.

Our answer here needs to be a resounding no; else we may risk enfranchising as intellectual experts individuals whom have very little information and employ methods and premises which would otherwise be judged by modern society, in light of their newer and more sophisticated information, as nonsense. The problem is that T’s information, methods and premises are quite possibly no longer appropriate given this more modern culture and information set.

Consequently, we cannot rely exclusively on demanding the epistemic rationality of T’s beliefs. If we did rely exclusively on demanding the epistemic rationality of T’s beliefs, disenfranchising T from his status as an intellectual expert would be difficult. So long as T did not take on any new significant information which calls into question the epistemic rationality his prehistoric beliefs, T may remain an intellectual expert indefinitely. This is despite of the fact that in such a
circumstance, $T$ would be epistemically impoverished when compared with his now modern setting. Intuitively, it is unclear that the caveman could still reasonably qualify as an expert in a more sophisticated time, even when his beliefs are epistemically rational for him. Therefore something more than epistemic rationality given one’s own information will be required.

A knee-jerk solution to this problem would be to insist that intellectual expertise constituting beliefs need to be sociocentrically epistemically rational. This would mean that the beliefs of any given intellectual expert would have to be epistemically rational given the pool of information reasonably available across that culture or society. This would solve the problem. If $T$'s beliefs had to be sociocentrically rational, then without revising his beliefs within any particular domain—revising in accord with the information now available, including the appropriate methods of investigation—he would no longer count as an intellectual expert.

However, I call this view a knee-jerk reaction because it is unnecessary to insist that intellectual expertise constituting beliefs need to be epistemically rational at the societal level, sociocentrically, i.e. broadly epistemically rational given the information available, rather than at the personal level, egocentrically, i.e. rational for me given my information, and basic and fundamental beliefs. I think we can fix the problem without invoking an essentially social conception of epistemic rationality, and therefore a primarily social conception of intellectual expertise.

To insist upon sociocentric epistemic rationality is to hit a nail with a sledgehammer, because nothing quite so dramatic is needed to solve the problem. The more moderate solution or requirement is that the individual have
egocentrically epistemically rational beliefs, *having accessed or attained most of the relevant information reasonably available*. If the epistemically rational beliefs held by T are not epistemically rational given most of the relevant information available in modern day society, then T would not qualify as an intellectual expert.\(^7\) This keeps the level of the epistemic rationality at the egocentric level, but demands that our intellectual expert be reasonably well informed, and at least up to date with today’s positions.\(^8\)

Thus, beliefs which are merely epistemically rational are not constitutive of intellectual expertise. For a belief to be constitutive of intellectual expertise, it will need to be epistemically rational given most of the relevant information reasonably available or attainable.\(^9\)

3.1.3) **How Egocentric? How Sociocentric?**

It may make sense at this stage to offer some clarity concerning how egocentric and how sociocentric my theory of intellectual expertise will be. One distinction we can draw is between an account which is exclusively egocentric, and an account which is exclusively sociocentric. An exclusively egocentric account of intellectual expertise would be an account that had no societal component or regard whatsoever. On an exclusively egocentric account of intellectual expertise, if person T were to qualify as an intellectual expert, he would do so regardless of the society he was in: even if T is a prehistoric caveman in modern day Britain. As such, it is not

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\(^7\) I discuss caveats to this position below.  
\(^8\) This does not necessarily make the rationality required essentially sociocentric. For instance, being up to date with today’s positions does not necessarily entail an endorsement of those positions. I discuss this issue below in 3.1.4.  
\(^9\) I discuss some exceptions to this position throughout the chapter.
clear that a purely egocentric account of intellectual expertise can deal with the modern caveman problem I outlined in section 3.1.2.

By contrast, an exclusively sociocentric account of intellectual expertise binds intellectual expertise to social criteria. As I mentioned in section 3.1.2, this is not the only way to solve the modern caveman problem. Additionally, as I suggest in section 3.1.5, it creates two further problems: the first concerns sending someone from a modern society back to a less technologically advanced society. If being an intellectual expert is a matter of meeting a certain society’s standards, then it is not clear that many current scientists would count as intellectual experts in less technologically advanced societies. The second problem concerns how we are to conceive of intellectual experts that break away from current intellectual dogmas: intellectual revolutionaries. I discuss both of these problems further in sections 3.1.5 and 3.1.6.

The approach I adopt for my theory of intellectual expertise is one that understands intellectual expertise as primarily egocentric, rather than exclusively egocentric. An example of the theory being primarily, but not exclusively egocentric is that I state that being an intellectual expert is a matter of being egocentrically epistemically rational, having accessed or attained most of the relevant information reasonably available.\(^\text{10}\) So there is a societal component tacked on.

However, this does not explain why my theory of intellectual expertise is primarily egocentric with a small sociocentric component, as opposed to a primarily

\(^{10}\) I continue to caveat and build upon some of the necessary conditions for intellectual expertise throughout the chapter, and indeed thesis.
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sociocentric with a small egocentric component tacked on. The answer to this question is twofold: The first past of the answer is that I utilise Foley’s theory of epistemic rationality. It is the basis of my theory and it is an egocentric theory. The second part of the answer is that there are certain situations, concerning epistemic trumping, where the sociocentric component is removed altogether as a necessary condition on intellectual expertise. I discuss epistemic trumping in section 3.1.6.

3.1.4) Access, Attainment, and Intellectual Revolutionaries

Turning now to the language I adopt, some may question what it means to have ‘accessed’ or ‘attained’ information which is available. I use these two notions of having attained and having accessed synonymously.\(^{11}\) Some may believe that even if a book is available to be read, and I have it open in my hand with my eyes skimming the words that there may be a sense in which I have not ‘accessed’ the work or ‘attained’ the information if I do not understand what is written. Further, some will note with concern that if we think of ‘understanding’ something as being a matter of having a ‘true’ account of what any given information implies, then we may open ourselves up to criticisms of the kind outlined in chapter 2. The question here concerns whether understanding ‘proper’ presupposes a true account of either any information, or of the implications of any particular information.

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\(^{11}\) There is an important distinction that can be drawn between simply having accessed and attained information: Having merely accessed does not necessarily imply that I have retained such information. By contrast, attained would seem to imply ‘having’ that information that I have accessed. Even if not all of it, at least some of it. I use both terms interchangeably because there do appear to be situations where merely having accessed such information may strike us as all that is needed. In other situations, we might want to be more demanding in our requirements.
As such, the requirement of accessing or attaining cannot be used to imply that one has, in any sort of objective sense, a true account either the information reasonably available, or of what that information implies. For example, assume that a scientist is considering a recent study from a peer reviewed journal, carefully examining the results of an experiment. It may be the case that the explanation of the results offered in the paper is in fact incorrect (not true). If the scientist believes the incorrect explanation, there may be a sense in which he has not properly accessed or attained what it is that he ideally would access or attain; namely the truth about what those results imply.

Another example; perhaps some past psychological experiments produced results which were used to construct incorrect theories. However the results themselves did imply some undisclosed truth that P. If the truth about these results, P, is however beyond the realm of current or near future scientific inquiry, then requiring that the expert understand P would constitute an unreasonable demand. As such, what is entailed by understanding cannot be held hostage to having a true account of what any given information implies.

However, neither can we require that ‘understanding’ be used in an exclusively egocentric epistemically rational sense either: this is because if all that was required of the scientist was for that scientist to think he had understood the information at hand, then the standard of epistemic rationality does not necessitate an improved epistemic position where such an improvement may be appropriate. Neither does it ensure that the expert meet the present epistemic standard of that community, where such a standard is in fact appropriate. For example, take person T. Let us say that person T is brought up to date and provided with most of the
relevant information available. If all that was required of person T was for him to epistemically rationally believe he has understood all this new information, and that he has updated his beliefs accordingly, T could quite clearly fail to meet any kind of expert standard, and still be in a comparatively epistemically desolate position relative to his new contemporaries. In order for T to continue to qualify as an intellectual expert, it seems T would now have to actually understand the information in an *appropriate* kind of way, not merely think he has.

What counts as appropriate? Such considerations might tempt us to venture down the beat and path of requiring a sociocentric conception of ‘understanding’ and ‘attaining’. The idea would be to use that sociocentric conception to ensure that our caveman is brought up to the proper epistemically, culturally or socially expected standards, in light of the information available. This would solve our quandary. However, I believe it would do so at some expense: a consequence of this move is that it starts to make intellectual expertise look necessarily social in nature. Aside from the aforementioned Cambridge changes which plague sociocentric accounts of intellectual expertise, there is an additional challenge for sociocentric accounts of intellectual expertise: intellectual revolutionaries.

Would intellectually expert intellectual revolutionaries still need to understand in a way which is sociocentrically rational? Is not one of the defining features of such revolutionaries that they break away from the existing dogmas, standards and ‘appropriate’ methods? In his *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*, Foley describes such individuals as ‘...intellectual rebels who consciously

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12 The reader should note that by ‘appropriate’ I do not mean necessarily mean objectively correct.
reject the prevailing opinions of their communities and the intellectual practises and assumptions of their traditions.”

Can we really just disenfranchise such revolutionaries on the basis that their beliefs are not constitutive of intellectual expertise? Not constitutive that is, simply because they do not comply with the accepted dogmas? Are we to say that revolutionary beliefs, while quite possibly epistemically rational in light of the relevant information, simply cannot be constitutive of intellectual expertise? If we insist upon sociocentric rationality to solve the modern caveman problem, it is not clear that we will be able to aptly deal with intellectual revolutionaries. Foley states that:

The history of ideas is filled with examples of iconoclasts and mavericks. Indeed, according to one influential reading of the history of science, scientific progress is largely the result of those who foment scientific revolutions by replacing the prevailing paradigm with a new one. With respect to any specific instance of intellectual rebellion, there will always be questions about the extent to which the rebels were rejecting the opinions and practices of their contemporaries as opposed to making novel applications of opinions and practices that were already in the air; but these historical questions do not affect the key conceptual point of the thought experiment, which is that in one important sense, being rational is not a matter of adhering to the opinions, rules, practices, or presuppositions of one’s intellectual community or tradition. Even if, historically, most intellectual revolutionaries draw heavily upon assumptions and standards implicit in their intellectual traditions, there are possible scenarios in which this is not the case, that is, scenarios in which the revolutionaries reject in a wholesale manner the prevailing intellectual assumptions and practices. In these scenarios, the radical

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nature of their opinions does not necessarily preclude these opinions from being rational...\textsuperscript{14}

So we are damned if we insist upon a correct (true) approach to the term ‘understanding’ because we open ourselves up to the criticisms outlined in chapter 2. We are damned if we require nothing more than an egocentric conception of ‘understanding’: complete dimwits who cannot appreciate the epistemic merit of information put in front of them could qualify as intellectual experts, largely as a function of their poor intellect or training.\textsuperscript{15} Lastly, a sociocentric conception of ‘understanding’ invites all sorts of defeat from Cambridge changes, and threatens to outcast those that are, arguably, some of the most gifted and adept thinkers among us.

3.1.5) Trumping and Intellectual Flaws

The answer, I think, is twofold: the first stage of the answer is to embrace an egocentric approach to ‘understanding’, ‘accessing’ and ‘attaining’. This allows revolutionaries to qualify as experts: something that a strict sociocentric conception of access or attainment would not readily allow for.

The second stage of the answer is to tack on to my theory of intellectual expertise the additional requirement that where one’s intellectual expertise constituting beliefs do not fit within a reasonable pluralism of current expert opinion, that one must be able to provide an epistemically trumping account of why


\textsuperscript{15} For example see Foley’s example of the psychiatrist and the patient: Foley, R., (2001), \textit{Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others}, Cambridge University Press, 40.
it is that the current consensus is incorrect. Such trumping must be, minimally, epistemically successful in a ‘weak way’. I leave the exact definition of epistemic success and weak epistemic success aside until chapter 6. However, by way of a preliminary, I state that both epistemic success and weak epistemic success require that the belief in question be epistemically non-trivial, and epistemically justified. Were person T not to revise his beliefs in accordance with the appropriate methods, information and standards available, and were he to have only epistemically trivial reasons for why he has not revised such opinions, his beliefs would not be constitutive of intellectual expertise.

While I think this requirement works, we might be tempted to adjust it slightly. Instead of asking for an account that trumps, we may be tempted to require an account which is not subject to any intellectual flaws. Why take this approach instead? I suspect it is much less demanding to require that I have not made any obvious flaws in my reasoning than it is to demand that I can epistemically trump other intellectual experts, or current expert consensus. Which option will prove to be appropriate will largely be a function of how epistemically demanding we want qualification as an intellectual expert to be; or alternatively how robust we want our intellectual experts to be. For my purposes either works: the requirement that the intellectual expert in question be able to provide an epistemically trumping argument or account, or not succumb to any obvious intellectual flaws works just fine. As such, the position adopted by my theory of

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The reader should note that one cannot epistemically trump if the account doing the trumping is intellectually flawed.
intellectual expertise is that understanding is *characteristically*, but not necessarily sociocentrically rational. So what does all this mean for person T?

It means that if person T keeps his prehistoric beliefs from a failure to realise the epistemic importance of the new information available to him, when other things equal that information should cause him to update his beliefs, person T will have succumbed to a serious intellectual flaw. Consequently person T will not qualify as an intellectual expert. Moreover, so long as person T cannot reasonably reject the current expert consensus via epistemic trumping, he cannot hold onto his prehistoric belief set and qualify as an intellectual expert. As such, should person T wish to qualify as an intellectual expert, he will have to adopt those positions which are sociocentrically rational inside his new society. Failure to either update his beliefs appropriately (avoid intellectual flaw), or to epistemically trump, will result in no longer qualifying as an intellectual expert.

The only way person T could continue to qualify as an intellectual expert, with his current prehistoric beliefs, is either to (1) epistemically trump those modern positions, or to (2) not succumb to any serious or obvious intellectual flaw in continuing to hold his prehistoric positions given the information now reasonably available. In doing (1) and/or avoiding (2), T could continue to qualify as an intellectual expert, and additionally count as intellectual revolutionary. So long as person T can epistemically ‘hold his own’, which I take to mean that his opinions are sufficiently epistemically robust, there is in principle no reason why he could not continue to qualify as an intellectual expert.

Consequently, I use the terms access or attain in an egocentrically epistemically rational sense. Yet accessing or attaining will typically, but not
necessarily, result in having *understood* in a sociocentrically epistemically rational sense. This means that one must normally, other things equal, understand information appropriately, in accordance with the relevant methods and standards utilised within a society. In the case of intellectual revolutionaries, they will not understand (at least on those intellectual expertise constituting beliefs which warrant their status as revolutionaries), in a way which is sociocentrically epistemically rational. Instead, they will understand in which is egocentrically epistemically rational and have additional epistemically trumping arguments which enjoy weak epistemic success. Alternatively, their beliefs which constitute their status as revolutionaries will not be intellectually flawed.

In the case of the caveman who has no society to speak of, or alternatively the time-travelling scientist from the previous chapter who no longer has any contemporaries, the sociocentric sense is automatically diminished to an egocentric sense.

Finally, we might ask what would happen if the time travelling scientist from present times arrives back in Newtonian times? Would the future scientist have to revise his beliefs so as to ensure their epistemic rationality in light of the information of that past and less epistemically advanced society? Were he not to, would he continue to qualify as an intellectual expert? An historical example of this could be when an intellectual expert from a European society arrived in the Americas, and engaged with the Incan or Aztecs. Clearly, the future scientist should not have to revise his beliefs in light of evidence or information he can reasonably regard as redundant, in order to still count as an intellectual expert. Why? Because just like the intellectual revolutionaries, he can epistemically trump.
For example, if we brought Aristotle forward to Newtonian times, and took Stephen Hawking back to Newtonian times, Aristotle may have to largely revise his beliefs to continue to qualify as an intellectual expert, where by contrast, Hawking may well get a ‘free-pass’. There are two reasons for this outcome: the first reason is that Aristotle could not reasonably regard that new information as redundant. A failure on Aristotle’s part to recognise the epistemic import of the new information in accordance with the appropriate methods and standards would see him demoted from his status as an intellectual expert. Aristotle would have succumbed to an intellectual flaw in not revising his beliefs.\(^\text{17}\) The second reason is that the time travelling scientist, in this case Stephen Hawking, has access to more information than the other intellectual experts of the time, extra (future) information, which allows him to epistemically trump current evidentially supported beliefs.\(^\text{18}\)

The definition of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs can accommodate for the time travelling scientist scenario: an intellectual expertise constituting belief is a belief which is epistemically rational for you to have, given that you have accessed most of the information reasonably available. This will often result in one attaining beliefs which are sociocentrically rational. Additionally, where one’s beliefs on a certain topic do not fit within the current reasonable pluralism of expert consensus, one must either possess epistemically trumping arguments for those positions, or alternatively not succumb to any obvious intellectual flaws.

\(^\text{17}\) Aristotle would have the option of holding on to his ancient beliefs provided that in doing so, he did not succumb to any intellectual flaw, having accessed most of the relevant new information: an example of which would be Newtonian physics.  
\(^\text{18}\) Note that those who would insist on hitting a nail with a sledge hammer, shifting from egocentric rationality to sociocentric rationality, may be forced to insist that the time travelling scientist revise his beliefs to be sociocentrically rational in order to continue to qualify as an intellectual expert.
In the case of the time travelling scientist, his pool of information exceeds the limits of that time, and as such the scientist in question has epistemically trumping information: information which is not rendered obsolete by the currently existing information pool. In the case of a caveman, since he cannot trump the information available, he must, in order to continue to count as an intellectual expert, either revise his beliefs in accordance with the information reasonably available, or not succumb to any obvious or serious intellectual flaw in not revising his prehistoric beliefs.

3.2) Doxastic Rationality

It is probably epistemically rational for you to believe that you are reading what I have written here, right now, or that the desk in front of you exists, or that you are human. We might say that it is epistemically rational for you to believe that the desk is in front of you since it is the conclusion of an argument that is uncontroversial for you, and is undefeated by other propositions which are uncontroversial for you to believe.

However, imagine that the motivating reason for the belief that you are human, or that the desk is in front of you, is that ducks grow on walls. The belief that the desk is in front of you may still be epistemically rational for you, since the proposition that the desk is in front of you may make sense given many of your other beliefs. One of these other beliefs could be that it makes sense for one to believe that when one sees that a desk is in front of them, that there really is a desk in front of them. As such, despite the motivation for the belief that the desk is in
front of you being ‘ducks growing on walls,’ the belief that the desk is in front of you is nevertheless epistemically rational. This is because epistemic rationality is focused upon whether a belief makes sense given your other propositional beliefs, and not the reason for why any particular belief is held.

Foley’s epistemic rationality concerns how rational a certain proposition is with regard to your other propositional beliefs, regardless of whether or not there is any causal link or connection between the propositions in question. Epistemic rationality does not concern the reason for why a belief is held. Each proposition is taken as isolated, or as atomic, and is evaluated alongside other atomic or isolated propositions. What is missing from epistemic rationality is a doxastic component; doxastic rationality. We might loosely describe a belief as doxastically rational when that belief is held for the ‘right’ reason(s). Doxastic rationality concerns the links or connections between beliefs.

Thus far I have focused on propositional rationality. However, epistemic rationality alone is not enough to ground intellectual expertise: intellectual experts believing certain propositions due to ducks growing on walls is completely unacceptable. Intellectual expertise will presuppose the possession of epistemically rational belief on the basis of the ‘right’ reasons. As such I shall argue that an intellectual expertise constituting belief is a belief which is epistemically rational in the rich sense of epistemic rationality. A rich sense of epistemic rationality will provide a kind of doxastic reassurance for my theory of intellectual expertise. In doing this I will visit Foley’s two arguments that are critical of doxastic rationality, and provide an account of his rich conception of epistemic rationality.
The first of Foley’s criticisms of doxastic accounts of rationality pertains to the directness of doxastic reasons:

The first problem arises... [when] the person’s evidence for \( p \) might cause him to believe \( p \) in a wayward manner. Ordinarily, when a person becomes aware that he has good evidence for a proposition \( p \), this in a straightforward way causes him to believe \( p \). But his becoming aware that he has this evidence might also cause him to believe \( p \) in an indirect way. Suppose, for example, that S’s becoming aware that he has good evidence for \( p \) somehow causes him to become excited, and this in turn causes him to trip and hit his head, which then somehow causes him to believe \( p \). This is a case where... [certain] epistemologists would want to deny that the person’s belief has the appropriate kind of causal history to be doxastically rational.\(^{19}\)

However stating what constitutes an appropriate causal history is not straightforward. Presumably we might count ourselves among those certain epistemologists that want to say that believing something for the right reasons is a matter of believing something because of a reasonable, identifiable relationship between a proposition and the evidence. That relationship should be explained on the basis of reason(s) which are epistemically rational. The second problem:

...concerns how much of S’s evidence for \( p \) must play an appropriate causal role in his believing \( p \) in order for his belief to be doxastically rational. Since normally the evidence required to make a proposition epistemically rational is relatively complex, it will be much too stringent to require that S reflect upon all the evidence needed to make a proposition \( p \) rational for him (including, for example, 


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all the “background assumptions”) and then to have these reflections cause him to believe $p$. It presumably also is too stringent to require that all this evidence causally contribute to his belief in some other way—for example, in an unconscious way. But if the entire body of evidence needed to make his belief $p$ propositionally rational for $S$ need not causally contribute to his believing $p$, how much of it must causally contribute to his believing $p$ in order for his belief to be doxastically rational? It will have to be admitted, I think, that there can be no very precise answer to this question. Accordingly, it also will have to be admitted, I think, that the notion of doxastic rationality may very well be irredeemably vague. 20

There are two parts to this problem. One concerns, as Foley says, accounting for how much any particular reason must contribute to the formation of our reason for a belief. The second problem pertains to the general issue regarding the identification of reasons. I will focus on this latter problem.

It is deceptively easy to give an account of what caused certain occurrences. On reflection, it is unclear to me that this seeming ease is warranted. Accurately identifying reasons for why something happened, or why I believe something may not be trivial. For example, imagine when measuring out 400 grams of sugar upon a scale that you actually pour out 401 grams. As one might expect, the side of the scale with the sugar on lowers. But what caused the side with the sugar on to lower? Commonly one might say that it was the 1 gram of sugar. But in a very serious and strict sense, if it was really that 1 gram of sugar, then that 1 gram of sugar would have been enough in and of itself to have tipped those scales. That 1 gram would be the reason. But this we know is not true. It was the 400 grams and

that 1 additional gram that tipped the scales, and so there is no single ‘the’ reason as opposed to a myriad of candidate reasons. Some might think that this is just a silly verbal trickery. Why couldn’t we just say that ‘too much sugar’ is what tipped the scales, or 401 grams in total? We could. However without gravity that sugar would not tip those scales. Gravity alone could also be cited as the reason; but again, gravity wouldn’t have come into the equation without that 1 gram, or indeed those 401 grams of sugar. Likewise, it is never just one new piece of evidence that causes me to form any particular belief, but this new evidence plus all of my beliefs about what constitutes good evidence and what this good evidence implies. To what degree does this or that reason need to be the motivating reason, and what might constitute the motivating reason? These problems that Foley identifies might well be insurmountable. What appeared pre-reflectively to be a simple and intuitive concept is, on reflection, apparently not that simple. Neither is it readily usable in my theory of intellectual expertise.

3.3) A rich conception of Epistemic Rationality

To capture the historical or causal sense of rationality, Foley suggests that we tack on to the propositional sense of epistemic rationality the further propositional requirement that any belief $p$ must be accompanied by a further argument which the agent actually believes, and that it is epistemically rational for the agent to believe.\(^{21}\) A doxastic sense of epistemic rationality, claims Foley:

...can be introduced in terms of this propositional sense. In particular, we can say that S’s belief \( p \) is epistemically rational in the doxastic sense just if (1) S’s belief that \( p \) is epistemically rational in the propositional sense, (2) there is an argument \( A \) that S believes is a good argument for \( p \), (3) this belief also is epistemically rational for S in the propositional sense, and (4) argument \( A \) roughly resembles an argument that is in fact a good argument for \( p \).\(^{22}\)

How does this help? The first thing we should note about Foley’s suggestion is that the reasons for the belief that \( p \) now need to be epistemically rational, but this isn’t all that is going on. As Foley comments a little later:

... if S’s belief \( p \) fails to meet any of the four conditions... then S is subject to epistemic criticism. If (1) is not met, he is subject to the criticism that in believing \( p \) he believes a proposition for which he does not have an adequate argument. If (2) is not met, he is subject to the criticism that in believing \( p \) he believes a proposition for which he does not believe he has a good argument. If (3) is not met, he is subject to the criticism that in believing \( p \) he believes a proposition for which it is not epistemically rational for him to believe he has a good argument. And if (4) is not met, he is subject to the criticism that in believing \( p \) he believes a proposition for which no argument that he rationally takes to be a good argument even roughly resembles an argument that in fact is a good one.\(^{23}\)

This allows the notion of epistemic rationality to cover the doxastic sense of epistemically rational belief. What does this mean? This means that on any belief where one does not fulfil those four conditions outlined by Foley, one could be

subject to self‐epistemic criticism. And this is irrespective of whether or not one is seeking to become an intellectual expert within any particular domain.

However there may be questions concerning what constitutes a *good* argument. If by a good argument one means a ‘true argument,’ then really this richer sense of epistemic rationality may not be a safe conception for a theory of intellectual expertise. This is because we are trying to distance the understanding of intellectual expertise from necessarily requiring knowledge or truth. Concerning what constitutes a ‘good’ argument, Foley claims that:

> It would be too stringent to require that S always be aware of an argument for \( p \) that has as its premises propositions that are properly basic for him. So let us say that the argument A that S here believes to be a good argument for \( p \) need not be a first‐level argument. It might be a second‐level argument. In particular, it might be an argument whose premises are not properly basic for S. What is required is that it be epistemically rational for S to believe that the argument is highly likely to have a true conclusion.\(^{24}\)

But the argument need not actually have a true conclusion; just that it is epistemically rational for the agent to believe that the argument has a true conclusion, or is likely true. For our purposes, there is no contention between this richer sense of epistemic rationality which covers the doxastic and propositional sense to epistemic rationality, and truth. As such, we can safely claim that there is a way to understand intellectual expertise constituting beliefs through utilising this rich conception of epistemic rationality: an intellectual expertise constituting belief is a belief which is epistemically rational in a rich kind of way, and it pertains to the

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reason for why something is the case. The kind of account in question will be either causal or teleological in nature. Moreover, the belief is epistemically rational in this rich sense, given that the believing agent in question has accessed most of the relevant information reasonably available.

3.4) Responsible Belief

My position will be that responsible belief is not in any significant way a prerequisite of intellectual expertise. Schematically, Foley presents a responsible belief as follows:

One responsibly believes a proposition P if one believes P and one also has an epistemically rational belief that the processes by which one has acquired and sustained the belief P have been acceptable, that is, acceptable given the limitation on one’s time and capacities and given all of one’s goals, pragmatic as well as intellectual and long term as well as short term. By “processes”, I mean to include whatever methods, faculties, and skills are involved in the acquisition and sustenance of the belief. Thus, if an individual has an epistemically rational belief that he or she has spent an acceptable amount of time and energy in gathering and evaluating evidence about P and also has used acceptable methods, faculties, and skills in gathering and processing this evidence, the belief P is a responsible one for the individual to have. Likewise, with respect to a belief Q that has been acquired automatically, without any deliberation, if the individual has an epistemically rational belief that the
faculties and skills that generated the belief are acceptable, that is, acceptable in light of all one’s goals, then belief Q is responsible.²⁵

For a belief P to be responsible, one must not only have that belief P, but one must also have a separate, epistemically rational belief, say Z, that the processes which led to the generation of P are acceptable in light on one’s goals. All of this can be reflective, or pre-reflective: this means that one can have actively deliberated about what to believe, or merely be aware of one’s beliefs or indeed have acquired those beliefs without actively thinking about that belief: automatically.

One of the more interesting features of a responsible belief is that it can come apart quite dramatically from an epistemically rational belief. One will notice in the very first sentence of Foley’s schematic account of responsible belief that the belief P need not itself be epistemically rational. In fact, Foley later claims that: “Even if I have evidence that makes it epistemically irrational to believe P, I might nonetheless responsibly believe P, since given the unimportance of the topic and the demands of my other ends, it might not have been appropriate to have taken the time and effort to sift through this evidence.”²⁶ Some may be tempted to believe that in the case of intellectual experts, a part of qualification as an intellectual expert consists in taking that time to sift through the appropriate evidence and believe only that which ought to be believed on the basis of that

evidence once it has been properly sifted through. However it is unclear that this is the case: Williamson cements this point when he states the following:

Even on a comparatively long timescale, the human race will only perform a tiny fraction of all the experiments it is humanly feasible to perform. Many possible experiments appear to lack any value; no outcome of them appears to provide significant evidence on any significant theoretical or practical question. Other possible experiments have more apparent value than that, but still deserve far lower priority than more urgent ones to which the resources should go instead.

What attitude should we take the outcome of an unperformed experiment? It may sound laudably open-minded to insist that we should not commit ourselves as to the outcome. On reflection, however, that attitude reveals itself as a damaging form of scepticism. For let T be a scientific theory so well confirmed by a mass of experimental and theoretical considerations that it is unreasonable to continue testing T, and reasonable to commit ourselves to T. Nevertheless, we cannot have separately tested all the experimentally testable consequences of T, since there are infinitely many. Thus T has some experimentally testable but untested consequence O. The proposed attitude to unperformed experiments requires us not to commit ourselves to O. But since T entails O, commitment to T involves commitment to O. Thus the proposed attitude requires us not to commit ourselves to T. But, by hypothesis, it is reasonable to commit ourselves to T. Thus the attitude requires us not to do something it is in fact reasonable to do. Hence the attitude is not binding. Indeed, it is worse than that. For the argument is very general: the attitude in question forbids commitment to virtually any scientific claim, however well confirmed within the limits of human feasibility. We should not take such an attitude... It is sometimes reasonable to commit oneself to the outcome of an experiment that has never
been performed, and perhaps will never be. More generally, it is sometimes reasonable to commit oneself to a hypothesis (such as O) that could be tested by systematic experiment but that never has been, whether or not it ever will be.²⁷

If one was to believe that responsibility consists in sifting through all of the available evidence and testing conditions, it would be hard if not impossible in many cases for that individual to achieve responsible belief, even if not intellectual expertise.

The important point to be made is that Foley talks of responsibility, and not epistemic responsibility. Although Foley does not provide us with a conception of epistemic responsibility, an approximate understanding might be that one responsibly believes a proposition P if one believes P and one also has an epistemically rational belief that the processes by which one has acquired and sustained the belief P have been acceptable, that is, acceptable given the limitation on one’s time and capacities and given one’s predominantly veritistic goals.

By contrast a generally responsible belief, the kind which Foley characterises, will not necessitate a predominantly veritistic goal. Ergo, it might be epistemically responsible for me to go about conducting research into a certain project and ultimately believe P, but not responsible in general. Perhaps the project in question has certain consequences which are of importance on moral grounds: some will believe this consequence is clear with the example of research in biological or nuclear weapons. There is a clear sense in which research into these fields might be epistemically responsible. After all, we want to know the truth about such things. However it is also clear that such research may be regarded as morally

irresponsible. The same might be said for cloning, and other similarly morally dubious fields.

Another related example might be that the only way to know for sure about the impact of biological weapons in an urban environment is to use them on living, breathing urban environments. It might be epistemically responsible to go ahead with some sort of ‘experiment’, but politically, socially, and morally irresponsible. One might be an expert in biological weapons and epistemically responsible, but, nevertheless irresponsible in general. Certainly, these considerations indicate that we are not entitled to the claim that intellectual expert belief is necessarily responsible, where responsibility is understood in more than just veritistic terms. Moreover, it may be the case that many experts do not have the goal of accurate and comprehensive beliefs. Although we might often think of experts as working hard to earn expert status, it is unclear that intellectual expertise necessarily leads to or requires that one possess the goal of wanting to be accurate and comprehensive in one’s beliefs. Think of Williams’s chemist example:

George, who has just taken his Ph.D. in chemistry, finds it extremely difficult to get a job. He is not very robust in health, which cuts down the number of jobs he might be able to do satisfactorily. His wife has to go out to work to keep them, which itself causes a great deal of strain, since they have small children and there are severe problems about looking after them. The results of all this, especially on the children, are damaging. An older chemist, who knows about this situation, says that he can get George a decently paid job in a certain laboratory, which

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28 I take no stance over the moral issues involved here. The purpose of the example is to demonstrate that general responsibility and epistemic responsibility can come apart.

Rocky Webb
pursues research into chemical and biological warfare. George says that he cannot accept this, since he is opposed to chemical and biological warfare. The older man replies that he is not too keen on it himself, come to that, but after all George’s refusal is not going to make the job or the laboratory go away; what is more, he happens to know that if George refuses the job, it will certainly go to a contemporary of George’s who is not inhibited by any such scruples and is likely if appointed to push along the research with greater zeal than George would. Indeed, it is not merely concern for George and his family, but (to speak frankly and in confidence) some alarm about this other man’s excess of zeal, which has led the older man to offer to use his influence to get George the job... George’s wife, to whom he is deeply attached, has views (the details of which need not concern us) from which it follows that at least there is nothing particularly wrong with research into CBW. What should he do?²⁹

The moral quandary is of no concern for our purposes. The difference relevant for our purposes lies between something being responsible all things considered and something being epistemically responsible. George might be epistemically responsible if he takes the job. However it seems more likely that he will not be epistemically responsible in taking the job. If, in accordance with the example, George does not pursue the research with zeal, even the epistemic responsibility is questionable. The fact is George may well want to delay the research, and jumping to conclusions, conclusions which are not epistemically

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responsible, may serve as a way to do this. In such a case George might be morally responsible but epistemically irresponsible. However, even if George were to behave in an epistemically irresponsible way, it would not seem to directly impact his status as an intellectual expert.

Consequently it is unclear that responsible belief ought to have an impact upon my theory of intellectual expertise. Additionally, it is unclear that the notion of epistemic responsibility offers anything important for intellectual expertise beyond what has already been provided by the rich conception of epistemic rationality. The rich conception of epistemic rationality can be safely characterised as propositional and doxastic rationality combined. As such, the theory of intellectual expertise I am providing will not accommodate for the notion of responsible belief, or even epistemically responsible belief.

3.5) Non-Negligent Belief

Similarly to responsible belief, non-negligent belief is not necessary for intellectual expertise. Schematically, Foley claims that one is non-negligent when one:

...believes a proposition $P$ if (a) one believes $P$, and (b) one does not believe, and it is not epistemically rational for one to believe, that the processes by which one has acquired and sustained the belief $P$ have been unacceptable, that is, unacceptable given the limitations on one’s time and capacities and given all of one’s goals. By “processes” I once again mean to include whatever methods, faculties, and skills are involved in the acquisition and sustenance of the belief. Thus, if an individual does not believe, and it is not epistemically
rational for the individual to believe that he or she has spent an unacceptably
small amount of time gathering and evaluating evidence about $P$, or employed
unacceptable methods, faculties, and skills in believing $P$, then his or her belief
is non-negligent. 30

One of the immediately important features about non-negligence is that it is
classified in part by the absence of a belief, and also in part by it not being
epistemically rational for you to believe. This signifies that it is not a mere pre-
reflective absence of a belief which is important, but that you also do not possess
beliefs which would make it epistemically rational for you to believe that the
processes for generating a belief $P$ have been unacceptable. What this means is
that one cannot possess all of those robust standards of epistemic justification for
the generation of a belief, say in one’s domain of expertise, but then fail to bring
out the implicit reasons for the rejection of a belief constituted by those robust
standards, and then still claim that one’s belief is non-negligent. In such a situation
where I possess all of those robust standards, and they are not met, my inattention
to the fact that such standards have not been met doesn’t show my non-
negligence; on the contrary, it indicates my negligence.

In order to be non-negligent in such a situation, one must not possess those
robust standards to be marked against, or indeed, not fail in marking a belief
against those standards.

However, it is not the case that non-negligent beliefs are required for
intellectual expertise. Both the notion of responsible and non-negligent belief are

goal sensitive. Whether or not something counts as non-negligent or responsible is in part a matter of one’s goals, and is often decided largely on the basis of one’s goals. For instance, in having the goal of possessing accurate and comprehensive beliefs, epistemic responsibility may be helpful, but is not clearly necessary. Additionally, one may not have the goal of possessing accurate and comprehensive beliefs, in which case one may rarely be epistemically responsible, but nevertheless possess accurate and comprehensive beliefs regardless.

Consequently, since it is epistemically rational for me to believe that there is no necessary uniformity to the nature of the goals of intellectual experts, the notions of responsible and non-negligent belief become unwieldy for intellectual expertise, and for our purposes irrelevant. Both non-negligent and responsible belief are not useful concepts for the elaboration of my theory of intellectual expertise.

3.6) Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed Foley’s conception of epistemic rationality, doxastic rationality, epistemic rationality in a rich sense of the term, responsible belief, epistemically responsible belief and non-negligent belief.

I argue that expertise can be unproblematically understood in terms of a rich conception of epistemic rationality, where it cannot be understood in terms of epistemic rationality alone, or even epistemic rationality when combined with traditional doxastic rationality. The rich conception of epistemic rationality
overcomes issues concerning the waywardness of any particular beliefs causal history.

Additionally, a rich conception of epistemic rationality grounds intellectual expertise constituting beliefs by requiring appropriate origins for those intellectual expertise constituting beliefs.

In the process of making this argument, I explain why I focus on a primarily egocentric rather than a primarily sociocentric account of intellectual expertise, and further demonstrate the flexibility that my theory of intellectual expertise inherits through an adoption of a subjective foundationalist framework. This flexibility is exemplified by being able, through the use of Foley’s theory of epistemic rationality, to potentially grant a caveman, person T, expert status as an intellectual expert.31

I argue that intellectual expertise is primarily egocentric in nature: my justification for this view is largely a matter of criticising primarily sociocentric accounts of intellectual expertise. Sociocentric accounts are defeated by those kinds of Cambridge changes provided in chapter 2, concerning Newton and the time travelling scientist. Moreover, my theory of intellectual expertise can accommodate for intellectual revolutionaries, where by contrast it is unclear that sociocentric or indeed objective conceptions of intellectual expertise can.

Both responsible belief and epistemically responsible belief prove problematic as a pre-requisite of intellectual expertise. This is because they can effectively be played off against each other; epistemically responsible belief and

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31 My intention is not to actually show that any particular caveman is an expert, or that it is likely that any particular relatively epistemically deprived individual was or is in fact an expert, but only that my theory of intellectual expertise can, should it be necessary, cope with such considerations.
responsible belief can seem to demand different courses of action in the same circumstance.

Finally, non-negligent belief and responsible belief are too goal directed to be in any way a reliable requirement for an intellectual expertise constituting belief. Status as an intellectual expert cannot be held hostage to a change in an entity’s desires.

As such a belief which is constitutive of intellectual expertise is a belief which is epistemically rational for you told, in a rich sense of the term, in light of most of the relevant information reasonably available. Typically these beliefs will also fit within a reasonable plurality of expert consensus. Where such beliefs do not fit within that plurality, they must be epistemically rational for the entity that holds them, and that entity in question must be able to either provide some epistemically trumping arguments or alternatively not have succumbed to an obvious or serious intellectual flaw in holding those intellectual expertise constituting beliefs.

Going forward, I will simply state that intellectual expertise constituting beliefs are epistemically rational in light of the information which is reasonably available. I do this for the sake of brevity. Typically this statement alone will capture what needs to be said. However, where appropriate, I will have in mind the criteria that I have outlined in the previous paragraph.

32 The definition and requirements of an intellectual expertise constituting belief are expanded upon in the next chapter.
Chapter 4: Qualifying as an Intellectual Expert

In the previous chapter I outlined the role of epistemic rationality in my theory of intellectual expertise. Instead of intellectual expertise presupposing some vast quantity of knowledge, I said that intellectual expertise presupposes epistemically rational belief. What's more, I said that an intellectual expertise constituting belief had to be epistemically rational given the information reasonably available. There were additional requirements as well: for example, beliefs constitutive of intellectual expertise should be non-trivial. Furthermore, where the beliefs in question do not fit within a reasonable pluralism of expert opinion, the beliefs in question cannot be obviously intellectually flawed, or alternatively, one must be able to epistemically trump the status quo of expert opinion in defence of those beliefs. But exactly how many intellectual expertise constituting beliefs are required before an individual qualifies as an intellectual expert? To put the question back into the traditional parlour, how much knowledge does it take to count as an expert?

In this chapter I consider the question of whether qualifying as an intellectual expert is a matter of either: (1) superiority to most of the community, in terms of having the most beliefs, (2) superiority to most of the community that reach a certain quantity threshold of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs, or lastly (3), merely reaching a threshold of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs.

The first conception (1) concerns whether or not intellectual expertise is simply a comparative matter. According to the comparative conception intellectual
expertise is necessarily esoteric (possessed by few), and qualifying as an intellectual expert is a matter of ‘being the best’ or ‘among’ the best, with no further requirements. ‘Being the best’ is understood as equivalent to possessing the highest quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs for any particular domain or sub-domain within one’s particular society. ‘Being among the best’ is understood as equivalent to possessing a comparatively high quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs for any particular domain or sub-domain within one’s particular society.

I call the second conception (2) the combined conception. According to the combined conception one qualifies as an intellectual expert when one is ‘among the best’ of those that possess a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. I call this conception the combined conception because it combines both a threshold and a comparative conception of intellectual expertise qualification. On this combined conception one must be among the best and possess at least some minimum quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. Some may find this conception preferable because it would allow for the non-existence of intellectual expertise in situations where it was clear that simply being the best was not enough to qualify one as an intellectual expert.

Finally, I will consider the threshold conception (3) of intellectual expertise qualification. According to the threshold conception of expertise qualification, one need only reach or surpass a threshold of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. That is one must have a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. As such, one need not be ‘among the best’ to qualify as an intellectual expert.
I criticise the comparative and combined conception of qualification through the use of thought experiments, and through the use of Cambridge change examples which are similar in nature to those outlined in chapter 2. These examples and thought experiments show that the advocate of an essentially comparative conception of qualification is at a serious disadvantage. These considerations lead to the conclusion that intellectual expertise cannot be comparative in nature.

By contrast, the threshold conception is non-comparative in nature. As such, the threshold conception is preferable. Consequently, I argue that intellectual expertise is not necessarily esoteric, by which I mean that it is not necessarily possessed by few: qualification on the threshold conception does not essentially limit the quantity of intellectual experts. The implication is that many (or indeed everyone) could simultaneously qualify as an intellectual expert, provided that they attain a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. I explore some particularly important implications of this position throughout the thesis, but especially so in chapter 7.

4.1) The Comparative Conception

For someone to qualify as an expert on the comparative conception of intellectual expertise, one needs to either be the best or one of the best within a certain domain. In this instance, being the best should be understood as equivalent to acquiring the highest quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs in a particular domain or sub-domain in one’s own particular society. Respectively,
being *among* the best should be understood as equivalent to acquiring a comparatively high quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs in a particular domain or sub-domain within one’s own particular society.¹

### 4.1.1) Preliminaries

Before we proceed there are a few important preliminary points to note. One concern is that some may wish to think in terms of degrees of rationality, or degrees of intellectual expertise constituting belief. The idea here is that one belief can be more rational or more constitutive of intellectual expertise than another. As such, one may believe that being the ‘best’ could be a matter of being ‘most’ rational, or of possessing beliefs which are ‘most’ constitutive of intellectual expertise.

I will not consider this option for two reasons. The first reason is for the sake of simplicity. It is not clear that I need invoke a degree based conception of rationality or intellectual expertise constituting belief in order to make sense of what it means to be the ‘best’.

The second reason is that it is unclear that epistemic rationality admits of degrees.² However there is another way of differentiating between two competing individuals, both of whom are epistemically rational having accessed most of the relevant information available. Imagine two professors, A and B, where A has accessed *slightly* more articles than B. Other things equal there is a sense in which

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¹ I suspect that one is usually measured against those that are considered to be within one’s own community. What constitutes one’s community however is a separate question. As the forces of globalisation have shrunk the world in more recent centuries and decades, I suspect that there is a meaningful sense in which we can talk about a nation or indeed the globe as a community itself.

² I discuss some related points in chapter 5 concerning peer disagreement.
the epistemic rationality achieved by A might be of greater epistemic merit than that achieved by B. This is because the pool of information held by A is slightly wider. Because the pool of information is slightly wider it may be the case that the standard of epistemic rationality is either harder to achieve or is in some way more sophisticated, albeit slightly. However this poses no problem for our understanding of ‘being the best’ as a matter of having the highest quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. This is because A, having widened his pool of information, will almost certainly have simultaneously increased his quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs.

If however, despite A’s wider pool of information, A fails to increase his number of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs, then there is no difference in terms of the number of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs between A and B.

Additionally, since any propositions held by A will not have gained justifications, but simply have swapped justifications—after all, A has failed to increase his quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs after having read the additional academic paper—additional merit will not necessarily obtain. Let us clarify this point with an example. Imagine that I am professor A and that my justification for Q is Y and Z. In reading a new academic paper, I come to believe that Q is also justified by X, and I come to believe X. However, in this example I am not allowed to new gain beliefs. I have the same quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs as B. As such, in coming to believe X, I simultaneously lose belief Z. This results in my belief that Q still having only two justifying positions: Y and X. While in some situations there may be more merit in believing Q on the
basis of Y and X rather than Y and Z, this cannot be guaranteed in all situations. The
newness of a paper, for instance, is no guarantee of quality.

Consequently, being the best can be understood as having the highest
quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs pertaining to any particular
domain, given that one has accessed most of the relevant information available.
Again, being among the best will be a matter of being one of those who has the
highest quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs within one’s own
society.

The last important point to note is that, if intellectual expertise was a matter
of being the best then there could only ever be one expert in any one domain at
any one time. To make this point clear, imagine that expert A and B are clearly
ahead of everyone else in their domain. Intuitively, we would be tempted to claim
that they are the experts. However because both are equal to each other, neither
one of them is the best. I take this to be reason enough to understand the
comparative conception of intellectual expertise qualification to be a conception
which pertains to being among the best rather than the best. I also adopt this
approach in the combined conception: on the combined conception, intellectual
expertise involves being among the best past a certain threshold.

4.1.2) Being Among the Best

As I understand it then, being among the best could involve falling within
something like the 95\textsuperscript{th} percentile for possessing the highest quantity of intellectual
expertise constituting beliefs within a particular domain. Moreover, I presume that
the individual in question is being measured within the parameters of one’s own community. Some might think that requiring experts to fall within the 95th percentile is too stringent. No doubt some will prefer a more lenient 90th percentile, and perhaps some even 80th. We should note that delineating which number is correct or appropriate is no trivial, uncontroversial task. However, whatever the preferred number, being among the best should be understood as being within that relevant percentile for one’s community.

For some the very task of delineating an intellectual expert/non-expert status cut-off point will dismiss this entire conception. Wherever that boundary is set it could prove to be arbitrary and controversial. This is problematic because it may be difficult to identify who is qualified and who does not qualify as an intellectual expert. We might note that there is a great vagueness in setting where exactly this cut-off point will lie.3 Whatever the cut-off point, there are two big problems that plague the comparative conception of qualification: the first problem concerns linking intellectual expertise qualification to any given population. The second problem concerns the inability of an advocate of the comparative conception, other things equal, to deny the existence of intellectual expertise, regardless of the domain.

3 Goldman also raises a relevantly similar point regarding setting a threshold of expertise qualification. That very point is quoted further below: Goldman, A., (2001), Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 63:1, 91.
Imagine that there is a very prestigious physics conference at which all expert physicists attend. These physicists represent the entire 90th percentile of physicists in existence. These physicists are the best 10% and for our purposes the relevant cut-off point between expert and lay status lies at the top 10%. At the opening of the conference, at which every expert physicist in existence is in attendance, a world ending event occurs: it could be a zombie apocalypse, the arrival of the four horsemen or an alien invasion. Anything along these lines will do. Every human on the planet dies, but quite bizarrely the physicists at the conference are left entirely unscathed. The world ending disaster itself ends, and the expert physicists are the only epistemic beings left alive on the planet. The physicists are however quite engrossed with the opening ceremony of the conference, and as such, are not aware of the world wide devastation. What’s more, the party responsible for the devastation has left all sources of information pertaining to physics intact, with the exception of any entities capable of intellectual expertise not invited to the conference.\(^4\)

If it is true that intellectual expertise qualification is linked to being among the best—being within the 90th percentile—then 90% of the physicists at the conference would no longer qualify as intellectual experts. Only the top 10% within any given domain (in this case physics) would qualify as intellectual experts. Despite no change in the relevant individuals understanding of physics and related

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\(^4\) The point here is that the pool of information reasonably available has not been entirely diminished, and that any relevant being capable of intellectual expertise not in attendance of the physics conference no longer exists.
domains, most individuals at the conference would no longer qualify as intellectual experts.

I take the demotion of 90% of the physicists at the conference to be reason enough to consider this conception problematic. An alternative qualification method could involve having a similar quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs compared to whoever currently possesses the most intellectual expertise constituting beliefs within a certain domain. This conception is still entirely comparative, and would fix the problem from the example above: since by hypothesis, the experts at the conference were all intellectual experts before the conference started. Their quantity of beliefs has not changed, and as such, each of the intellectual experts at the conference will continue to qualify as an intellectual expert despite the world wide devastation.

This conception is still essentially comparative, since qualification as an intellectual expert necessarily entails meeting a shifting standard tailored to how many intellectual expertise constituting beliefs another individual has.

However this understanding is also problematic. Let’s flip the example of the physics conference on its head, such that only the physicists at the conference died in the world ending disaster, and that everyone else lived. Instead of a zombie apocalypse, the conference was hit by a meteor or some such thing. Would some of those that had formerly not qualified as intellectual experts on physics now suddenly qualify as intellectual experts on physics? The answer is yes. And this is because what now counts as enough intellectual expertise constituting beliefs has shifted: where before certain individuals would not have had enough beliefs, now
they would. And this is simply because some individuals, elsewhere in the world, were killed by a meteor at a conference.

I find such a conclusion hard to accept. I do not accept it partly because on the comparative conception of intellectual expertise qualification, an individual may go from qualification to non-qualification (and vice versa) without any change in mental states. The only change required for qualification as an intellectual expert, under this conception, could be external to that individual. A simple Cambridge change cannot result in expert qualification or disqualification, even if it does result in one being either the best, or among the best.

4.1.4) Democritus’ Problem

A separate issue concerns whether the comparative conception of intellectual expertise qualification allows for us, other things equal, to deny the existence of intellectual experts. This should concern us for two reasons. The first reason is that being the best or even among the best may not necessitate the possession of a positive belief. The second reason is that being the best does not always clearly qualify one as an expert.

Other things equal, we do not normally think that Democritus ought to count as an expert nuclear physicist, as opposed to just an expert physicist. The reason for this is because Democritus cannot have had enough information, or positive epistemically rational beliefs pertaining to, nuclear physics specifically. However Democritus may have had an intellectual expertise qualifying quantity of beliefs pertaining to physics more generally. Some of those intellectual expertise
constituting beliefs about physics may pertain to nuclear physics, albeit by modern standards in an unsophisticated, trivial, and indirect way.

Rather than simply declare that back in ancient Greece there were no intellectual experts on nuclear physics, the comparative conception has us follow the thought that Democritus ought to qualify as an intellectual expert, specifically on nuclear physics, because he was the best or among the best at the time.\footnote{I do not wish to claim that Democritus was in fact the best physicist within his community, or indeed a nuclear physicist. The use of Democritus is merely illustrative.} Democritus might have been the best nuclear physicist of the time, but it is quite clear that Democritus should not count as an intellectual expert in nuclear physics, regardless of his status as the best. Democritus qualifying as an intellectual expert on nuclear physics strikes absurdity because it is clear that in such scenarios ‘being the best’ or ‘among’ the best is insufficient for qualification as an intellectual expert.

By the same token, intellectual expertise cannot be just a matter of not succumbing to epistemically irrational beliefs. An individual could achieve this simply by suspending judgement on any given issue. Typically young children achieve a great many absences of irrational belief, but nevertheless fail to qualify as an intellectual expert. Goldman claims that:

If the vast majority of people are full of false beliefs in a domain and Jones exceeds them slightly by not succumbing to a few falsehoods that are widely shared, that still does not make him an "expert" (from a God's-eye point of view). To qualify as a
cognitive expert, a person must possess a substantial body of truths in the target domain.\(^6\)

Veritistic terms aside, I take a part of Goldman’s point to be that a positive doctrine of some sort is required. I suspect any sensible account of intellectual expertise will have to completely endorse this requirement. As such, simply possessing a vast number of negative epistemically rational beliefs cannot warrant qualification as an intellectual expert. For all practical intents and purposes, one may be able to hold an effectively infinite number of negative epistemically rational beliefs, each of which is mundane, uninformative and trivial. However, some negative epistemically rational beliefs can be informative and purposeful. As such, we shall simply say that intellectual expertise cannot be constituted exclusively by beliefs that do not advance a positive doctrine. No doubt there is again some vagueness in setting how many positive beliefs intellectual expertise requires, but what we can say is that the number should not be trivial.

These problems indicate that a comparative conception of intellectual expertise qualification requires a threshold of positive intellectual expertise constituting belief possession. Set high enough, the threshold could serve to stop Democritus qualifying as an intellectual expert on nuclear physics, and allows us to insist upon the possession of positive epistemically rational beliefs.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Some may question why it is I single out a Democritus and discredit him as an expert nuclear physicist when I have a clear interest in claiming that past intellectual experts really did qualify as intellectual experts. The answer here is that my intention is not to disenfranchise Democritus as an expert physicist, but as an expert *nuclear* physicist.
4.2) The Combined Conception

A combined conception of threshold and comparative qualification certainly seems to be Goldman’s preferred understanding of cognitive expertise qualification:

To qualify as a cognitive expert, a person must possess a substantial body of truths in the target domain. Being an expert is not simply a matter of veritistic superiority to most of the community. Some non-comparative threshold of veritistic attainment must be reached, though there is great vagueness in setting this threshold. ⁸

One way of understanding this combined conception of intellectual expertise qualification is as a matter of being among the best of those who pass a certain threshold. Understanding the combined conception in this way will allow for the rejection of intellectual expertise in cases where simply being the best does not either (1) involve the possession of a positive doctrine, (2) or is supposedly constituted by the mere absence of epistemically irrational beliefs, or (3) where the alleged intellectual expert in question simply does not possess enough relevant intellectual expertise constituting beliefs.

I suspect this point of view may come quite naturally to many. Some will identify the threshold with a standardised qualification such as an undergraduate degree, or if you like perhaps a postgraduate degree such as a Ph.D. While the straw-man will not insist upon any particular qualification, qualification in the certificated sense, there is some minimal standard which must be met, with expert

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status being awarded to those who are among the best of those that pass that standard.

The combined conception solves the issue of denying intellectual expertise to candidates who clearly do not warrant such status. On the combined conception we can claim in a meaningful sense that Democritus was not an intellectual expert on nuclear physics. We can simply say that the individual in question did not possess a sufficient number of positive beliefs in the relevant domain or sub-domain, even if he or she was the best.

However the combined conception fails to solve those other problems associated with the comparative conception. Because the combined conception adopts components of the comparative conception, it also inherits some those aspects which are problematic. The combined conception will succumb to population flux issues, and will face concerns regarding the demotion and promotion of individuals to expert and non-expert status on the basis of changes external to those individuals: Cambridge changes. Consequently it is unclear whether the combined conception offers us an understanding of intellectual expertise qualification that we will want to pursue. So although the combined conception succumbs to fewer problems than the comparative conception, the combined conception is still a conception which succumbs to problems which serve as defeaters.
4.3) The Threshold Conception

The threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification simply involves possessing a minimum quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. These beliefs would need to be epistemically rational given most of the information reasonably available within one’s society, and would need to be domain specific. With the threshold set at the right point, this conception will allow for Democritus to be denied the status of an intellectual expert on nuclear physics. As such, the threshold conception allows for the denial of intellectual expertise.

Some might wonder why I am so quick to want to deny the possibility of intellectual expertise; some of my chief criticisms against the traditional understanding of intellectual expertise in chapter 2 concerned my desire to enfranchise, not disenfranchise past intellectual experts like Democritus. While it is my intention to provide a theory of expertise that allows for the possibility of past historical experts, it is also my intention to not necessitate the existence of intellectual expertise, other things equal, in all domains, at all times, regardless of the information is possessed, or indeed not possessed. There may be some societies that really do not have intellectual experts in certain fields: like that of ancient Athens when it comes to nuclear physics. So my theory of intellectual expertise must achieve a balancing act.

The threshold conception not only achieves this balancing act but it also solves the population flux problems as well. In the case of the world ending disaster, there would be no need to change the intellectual expert status of the individuals either at the conference, or not at the conference. It is simply the case
that if the conference was hit by a meteor, the world is left without any intellectual expert physicists.

Likewise, it is simply the case that if a world ending disaster occurs, leaving the conference unscathed, all those individuals who were intellectual experts before the disaster remain to be intellectual experts after the disaster. This is because each intellectual expert that passed the threshold of intellectual expertise constituting belief acquisition before the disaster continues to pass it after the disaster. This I think has to be correct: nothing about the physicist’s beliefs regarding physics has changed, and only the population of non-expert physicists has changed.

According to the threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification, qualification as an intellectual expert is a matter of one possessing or not possessing a certain quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs pertaining to any particular domain. Whether or not I qualify as an intellectual expert cannot be a matter concerning whether or not someone else qualifies as an intellectual expert.

However the threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification is not without controversy. One implication of the threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification is that intellectual expertise is not necessarily esoteric. Intellectual expertise is not necessarily a matter of being either the best, or among the best. In fact, the threshold conception of qualification could allow for
everyone to be an intellectual expert, provided everyone in question has enough positive intellectual expertise constituting beliefs.\(^9\)

Some may find this to be all the ground they need to reject the threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification. Such individuals may think that esotericism is essential to intellectual expertise. There is a contrast between the one and the many comes from at least as far back as Socrates in the *Apology*. Kraut states that:

> When Socrates cross-examines Meletus in the *Apology*, his prosecutor asserts that Socrates is the only one who corrupts the young, and that all other citizens know how to improve them (24d-25a). To this, Socrates objects that when it comes to horses, very few know how to train them. ‘Only one can make them better, or very few, namely the horse-trainer, whereas the many, if they own and use horses, ruin them. Isn’t that the way it is, Meletus, both for horses and all other animals?’ (25b2-6). These last words—‘all other animals’—make it obvious that, according to Socrates, most people are morally deficient and transmit their deficiencies to the young.\(^10\)

However I do not think the point Socrates is making is that expertise is necessarily esoteric. Instead I take it to be the case that intellectual expertise is often or typically possessed by few, but not necessarily possessed by few. In some future utopian society where the standards of education far surpass any modern day standard, or perhaps in some future where entities can be ‘uploaded’ with propositional information pertaining to any particular domain, many individuals

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\(^9\) I bring out some of the implications of this position, in particular for the relationship between expertise and democracy, in chapter 7.

could possess many intellectual expertise constituting beliefs, and as such, qualify as intellectual experts within a certain domain.

In such a situation some might be tempted to raise the standard or threshold at which one transfers from non-expert to expert status in order to forward an understanding of intellectual expertise as necessarily esoteric. However if one were to raise the bar to limit or diminish the number of intellectual experts, then one would alter the threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification to a comparative conception.

As such, we have two options: either to reject the threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification or to accept that in this utopian situation there would be many intellectual experts. Since the other conceptions of intellectual expertise qualification are problematic, it may be best to accept the threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification. After all, it is unclear that if there was suddenly a great boom in the number of students studying and passing the tests necessary to qualify as a medical doctor, that those recently qualified might not really count. It is far more straightforward to say that we just have a lot of doctors.

As such I will understand the structure of intellectual expertise qualification to be a matter of surpassing a certain threshold of intellectual expertise constituting belief possession, where at least some of those beliefs are positive.
4.4) Summary

In this chapter I outlined three conceptions of intellectual expertise qualification: the comparative conception, the combined conception and the threshold conception. I argued for the threshold conception, and criticised the comparative and combined conception. The comparative conception was flawed for several reasons. One reason is that it opens up qualification as an intellectual expert to Cambridge changes, such that a person or entity can be instantly qualified or disqualified as an intellectual expert based on the number of other intellectual experts. A second reason is that if qualification as an intellectual expert amounts to nothing more than simply being ‘among the best’ then qualification as an intellectual expert could amount to nothing more than not being as bad as the rest. This may entail little more than being the one chemist that did not blow up the lab.

At this stage a caveat was introduced to our understanding of best: by best, one means having the highest quantity of positive intellectual expertise constituting beliefs pertaining to any particular domain. This however still seems to enfranchise far too many individuals as intellectual experts in inappropriate domains, such as Democritus in nuclear physics. Consequently the comparative conception was dismissed in favour of the combined conception.

The combined conception requires that one be among the best after a certain threshold of intellectual expertise constituting belief attainment. The combined conception provides a solution to the Democritus as nuclear physicist problem: the combined conception allows for the denial of intellectual expertise by requiring a minimum number of positive intellectual expertise constituting beliefs
pertaining to any particular domain; a bottom line. This is an option that was not available for the comparative conception of intellectual expertise qualification.

Nevertheless, the comparative conception still falls prey to Cambridge changes, where one can become an intellectual expert or be demoted from status as an intellectual expert based on changes to or in others rather than oneself.

This leaves us with the final conception of intellectual expertise qualification, the threshold conception. According to the threshold conception, one simply needs to possess a sufficient number of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. If what constitutes a sufficient number of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs is subject to change, what drives the threshold up or down cannot concern the number of intellectual experts. If we change what counts as a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs in order to limit the number of intellectual experts, we will slip into a comparative conception of intellectual expertise qualification. As such, a consequence of the threshold conception of intellectual expertise qualification is that intellectual expertise is not necessarily esoteric. Theoretically, everyone could in principle simultaneously qualify as an intellectual expert on everything.
Chapter 5: Peer Disagreement

In this chapter I will argue that my theory of intellectual expertise need not respond to issues of peer disagreement. However, some of the issues which affect the peer disagreement debate affect my theory of intellectual expertise: namely epistemic objectivism.

Towards the first half of this chapter I review the distinction between expert and peer disagreement. I argue that my theory of intellectual expertise need not respond to issues of peer disagreement, and that when utilising my theory of intellectual expertise, there is no problem concerning expert disagreement.

I then continue to outline the nature of the ‘uniqueness thesis’. The uniqueness thesis is the view that only one attitude toward any particular proposition is epistemically justified, given any one body of evidence. This in turn leads to a discussion concerning arguments for and against epistemic relativism. I focus on Boghossian’s arguments against epistemic relativism. I conclude that for my theory of intellectual expertise to have teeth, epistemic objectivism will have to be true. However, I note that arguing for this conclusion on epistemic grounds is challenging to say the least. As such, I side with epistemic objectivism on practical rather than epistemic grounds.

In the second half of the chapter, I focus on reviewing the implications of epistemic objectivism on the peer disagreement debate. I argue, contrary to Feldman, that the suspension of judgement is not the clear choice when faced with peer disagreement.
5.1) Experts, Peers, and Disagreement

In the first chapter I claimed that there was such a thing as intellectual expertise. I said that intellectual expertise was a matter of possessing beliefs concerning why something was the case. As such intellectual expertise is an account giving type of expertise. As I argued in the second chapter, these beliefs do not need to be true. What these beliefs do need to be is epistemically rational given the information reasonably available to the epistemic agent.\(^1\) Additionally, they should not be trivial, and at least some of them should advance a positive doctrine. Once one has enough of these epistemically rational beliefs pertaining to why something is the case, they will have surpassed the criteria I have outlined thus far for intellectual expertise.\(^2\)

I also said before that my theory of intellectual expertise would be preferable to other accounts of relevantly similar kinds of expertise, provided my theory did not run into either as many problems or more serious problems than those other accounts. I noted that the traditional understanding of intellectual expertise encountered problems concerning how we are to think about experts from the past such as Newton and Aristotle, given that many of their beliefs were in fact incorrect. Moreover, I noted problems concerning the very existence of intellectual experts, vacuousness and expert disagreement. My theory of intellectual expertise avoids each of these problems by removing truth as a prerequisite of an intellectual expertise constituting belief. As such, Aristotle and

\(^1\) For more a complete account, please see chapters 3 and 4.
\(^2\) For details of which, please see chapter 3. Additionally, it should be noted that I have only outlined some necessary conditions for intellectual expertise, and not sufficient conditions. As such, the account I have provided, and am continuing to provide is not exhaustive.
Newton could have qualified as intellectual experts without having true beliefs. Likewise, the same applies to current and future experts. A new revelation tomorrow in a field such as physics will not disenfranchise any current physicists; or rather reveal that these physicists were never really experts in the first place. This thought carries through to all domains. Because disenfranchising up to every intellectual expert that has ever been is no longer a possibility, we prevent intellectual expertise from becoming vacuous and irrelevant. Moreover, expert disagreement is no longer an issue; intellectual expert A and intellectual expert B can have intellectual expertise constituting beliefs which conflict. So long as those beliefs are epistemically rational given most of the relevant information available, they are constitutive of intellectual expertise. Typically, such beliefs will fall within a range of reasonable expert consensus. Where they do not, the intellectual revolutionary in question meets extra requirements.

Expert disagreement was only an issue on the traditional understanding of intellectual expertise. If two experts both shared an intellectual expertise constituting belief, and that belief had to be true to be constitutive of intellectual expertise, then there is no way that the two individuals could disagree on that belief.

However peer disagreement is a separate issue to expert disagreement. Peer disagreement concerns whether or not two epistemic peers can rationally disagree, when presented with an identical pool of information.\(^3\) It should be noted that experts are not necessarily peers, and peers are not necessarily experts. By epistemic ‘peers’, Feldman refers to people who “…are roughly equal with respect

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\(^3\) Or alternatively two pools of information which are not significantly dissimilar.
to intelligence, reasoning powers, background information, etc.\textsuperscript{4} By peers we should also understand individuals that have dedicated similar quantities of time in reasoning about the issue. Although you and I might be roughly equivocal in terms of intelligence, disagreement between us could be adequately explained by a significant contrast in the time that both you and I have spent reasoning on an issue. If for instance I have spent five minutes quickly thinking the issue through, and you have spent five years carefully examining the arguments on either side, there may be little difficulty in explaining the cause of disagreement. \textsuperscript{5}

Disagreement occurs when one person believes a proposition which another denies (disbelieves). \textsuperscript{6} “[T]wo people have a \textit{reasonable disagreement} when they have a disagreement and each is reasonable (or justified) in his or her belief.”\textsuperscript{7} Furthermore, “[w]hen people have had a full discussion of a topic and have not withheld relevant information, we will say that they have \textit{shared their evidence} about that topic.”\textsuperscript{8}

We might note that the issue of peer disagreement poses no issue for my theory of intellectual expertise because intellectual experts need not necessarily be peers, even when two intellectual experts have considered most of the relevant information available. There is nothing about the definition of a peer which entails

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\textsuperscript{5} One suggestion might be that it is enough that we both regard ourselves as having satisfied our deepest epistemic standards with regard to whether or not we can justifiably believe any given proposition.
\end{flushend}
that only experts can be peers, or that peers are necessarily experts. Two non-expert children could be epistemic peers.

As such, the controversy surrounding peer disagreement debates does not engulf my theory of intellectual expertise. We might note further that interesting instances of peer disagreement are typically very rare indeed. However, although intellectual experts are not necessarily epistemic peers, intellectual experts may be epistemic peers. As such, it may be worth pursuing the problem of peer disagreement for a resolution.

As argued by Feldman, the problems of peer disagreement can be broken down into two questions:

Q1) Can epistemic peers who have shared their evidence have reasonable disagreements?

Q2) Can epistemic peers who have shared their evidence reasonably maintain their own belief yet also think that the other party to the disagreement is also reasonable?

One question we might want to ask early on is whether Feldman’s ‘reasonable’ is just another byword for rational? Feldman tells us that the issue that puzzles him “...is not about whether generally reasonable people can disagree in a specific case, even when they have the same evidence. Surely they can. The issue is whether they are both reasonable in the contested case.” Feldman makes

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9 This is due to the definition of ‘peer’ used in the peer disagreement literature. We should also note that peer disagreement being rare is a contingent rather than necessary feature of our world.
it clear that by ‘reasonable’ he does not just mean avoiding easy mistakes or being a generally reasonable person. Reasonable people can make mistakes. By a ‘reasonable person’ Feldman understands a person who holds reasonable beliefs which he defines as follows: “… a belief is reasonable only when it has adequate evidential support.”

So the question is, can two people both actually be reasonable in this stronger sense when they disagree, despite pooling their evidence? Feldman’s answer to this question is no.

A second, separate problem, concerns how one ought to react upon discovering a disagreement with someone whom they regard as an epistemic peer. If despite having sufficiently similar cognitive powers, evidence, time, and dedication, you and I come to differing conclusions concerning a certain issue or question, such that I affirm P and you deny P, what should we do: should we continue to stick to our guns? Should we defer to our peers position? Should we suspend judgement?

Feldman and many other philosophers (for example, Christensen and Elga) argue more or less for the conciliatory position that when faced with peer disagreement, one should suspend judgement. Failure to suspend judgement unjustifiably privileges the epistemic importance of one person’s beliefs above the others purely on the basis that the beliefs in question are their beliefs.

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13 For the sake of ease I will not draw a distinction between something being reasonable or rational, and will use the two interchangeably in this section.
The idea here is that since I believe that we are epistemic peers, and I believe that we both have a veritistic goal, I would be epistemically unjustified to demote your beliefs to a lower epistemic status, or to promote my beliefs to some higher epistemic status, and thus conclude that one of us was correct, and the other incorrect. This is because I have already accepted that we are epistemic peers, and that one of us does not have epistemic authority or superiority over the other. An example will help clarify this point: say you and I both own a calculator and that we have owned these calculators for our entire lives. As far as we know, our personal calculator has never erred in calculation. This implies that it is rational for each one of us to believe that our own calculator has an excellent track record. Say now regarding some question that the two calculators disagreed: after putting in the sum, the two calculators came to differing answers. Should I merely accept my calculator’s conclusion as correct and disregard yours? Should I do this merely on the basis of it being my calculator? It’s not obvious that deference to my own calculator is the correct epistemic move.

Moreover, some maintain that upon finding out that we disagree regarding a certain proposition, I cannot use this disagreement as evidence to demote you from your status as my epistemic peer, and thus claim that my judgements on this issue have epistemic authority or superiority. This is because in order to demote you from your status as my peer, I would have to use the disagreement which occurred while I still granted you status as my peer, and this would be a case of circular reasoning: using evidence which has already been labelled as suspect.
However, I find this position unconvincing. Imagine for instance that you and I are medical doctors and we consider ourselves to be peers. We are both giving our opinion about what we think is ailing a male patient of ours, and I suggest one typical problem associated with the symptoms in question, and you state that you think he is pregnant. I’m not sure I could help but epistemically demote you for suggesting pregnancy as a potential cause. Surely I only ought not to demote you, so long as it is possible for me not to demote you.15

5.2) The Uniqueness Thesis

The literature on peer disagreement turns on the uniqueness thesis. The Uniqueness thesis is the claim that “… a body of evidence justifies at most one proposition out of a competing set of propositions (e.g., one theory out of a bunch of exclusive alternatives) and that it justifies at most one attitude toward any particular proposition. As I think of things, our options with respect to any proposition are believing, disbelieving, and suspending judgement. The Uniqueness Thesis says that, given a body of evidence, one of these attitudes is the rationally justified one.”16

The uniqueness thesis has then three parts. The first part (1) is that any one pool of information will, all things considered, either support or not support a certain proposition: for example, the evidence given at a court case all things considered will either support or not support the proposition that the defendant is

15 This argument is inspired by a relevantly similar argument from Elgin, which I discuss below. For the argument in question, see: Elgin, C., (2010), Persistent Disagreement, Disagreement, ed., Feldman, R., and Warfield, T., A., Oxford University Press.
guilty. While it’s true that some information may support guilt, and some
information innocence, the information cannot all things considered indicate both
innocence and guilt. The second part (2) is that there is only one attitude toward
any given proposition that is justified by that evidence. A third (3) and important
claim which is not immediately obvious given the formulation above is that under
the uniqueness thesis “...evidence uniquely determines one correct attitude
[toward any given proposition].” The difference between the second and third
claim is that the second claim does not entail a thesis pertaining to what
‘determines’ what ought to be believed, and that the determination of what ought
to be believed depends solely on evidence.

Schematically, Feldman’s position can be presented as:

1) All things considered, E either supports or does not support any given P.

2) All things considered, only one attitude Q toward any particular P is
   supported by E.

3) The epistemic rationality of attitude Q to P is determined exclusively by E.

‘Q’ represents the relevant attitude of belief, disbelief or the suspension of
judgement. ‘P’ represents the proposition in question. ‘E’ represents the entire
pool of relevant evidence. The uniqueness thesis rests upon an epistemic absolutist

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18 By the term epistemically rational we should not limit our understanding to the way it has been
utilised in the past few chapters: namely, in the way I understand Foley to intend its use. The
understanding of ‘epistemically rational’ as utilised by Goldman and Feldman is not explicitly linked
to Foley’s use of the term. Epistemic rationality should be understood in this chapter to mean
simply that something is rational, given that one has the aim of believing the truth.
picture of epistemically rational justification; a picture which has become increasingly controversial outside of English speaking western analytic philosophy.

5.3) Epistemic Objectivism and Relativism Explained

Epistemology and social epistemology are subjects which have deep dividing lines between thinkers. Ever since ancient Greece, where Platonic thought sparred with Heracleitian and Protagorean relativism, there have been continual debates about the nature of truth and justification. In English speaking analytic philosophy, any sort of relativism about truth and justification has proved continually unpopular. This runs contrary to the recent popularity of ‘social constructivist’ views which have taken root in social sciences and humanities alike. Social constructivists, sometimes referred to as postmodern relativists, hold what Boghossian calls an equal validity thesis: “There are many radically different, yet “equally valid” ways of knowing the world, with science being just one of them.”\(^{19}\) As such it directly contradicts all three listed positions I assigned to Feldman in the last section.

Typically the advocate of equal validity will hold either the view that there are no objective facts by merit of which any X is true, or that there are no objective epistemic principles by which one can claim that a belief X is epistemically justified, or both. This idea rests in part on the view that there are no truths or epistemic principles which are not theory laden. Boghossian quotes Lennon to summarise one postmodern approach to knowledge:

Feminist epistemologists, in common with many strands of contemporary epistemology, no longer regard knowledge as a neutral transparent reflection of an independently existing reality, with truth and falsity established by transcendent procedures of rational assessment. Rather, most accept that all knowledge is situated knowledge reflecting the position of the knowledge producer at a certain historical moment in a given material and cultural context.²⁰

I said before that I would not be considering any sort of relativism when it came to truth, and that in providing my theory of intellectual expertise I would simply take it for granted that if X is true, then it is true ‘for’ everyone. In fact, I claimed that the very idea of there being a truth ‘for’ someone holds no water with me. Without the view that there is an objective truth of the matter concerning what is or is not the case, the appeal of my theory of intellectual expertise based in epistemic rationality is diminished.²¹ As such, I will not consider postmodernist or constructivist views regarding truth. However, what I will consider is postmodernist or constructivist views regarding justification. Goldman has an excellent passage outlining what epistemic objectivism regarding justification is, and what it seems to imply:

This view holds that there is objective rightness in matters of epistemic norms, standards or principles. Epistemic objectivists characteristically hold that there is a uniquely correct E-system and all systems incompatible with this one are wrong… The idea is that a belief or another doxastic state is justified or unjustified as long as it conforms or fails to conform to what is prescribed by the correct E-system,

²¹Though this is not to say that the theory itself is defeated.
given the subject’s evidence. Since mainstream epistemologists generally assume that beliefs are objectively justified or unjustified, the truth or falsity of epistemic objectivism is a critical issue... Objectivism, understood as entailing a uniquely correct E-system, seems to imply the impossibility of reasonable (that is, justified) disagreement.\textsuperscript{22}

The term ‘E-system’ is short hand for ‘epistemic system’. An epistemic system is a “...set of norms, standards, or principles for forming beliefs and other doxastic states.”\textsuperscript{23} As Goldman presents it, epistemic objectivism is contrasted with epistemic relativism. There are two particular forms of epistemic relativism Goldman is interested in. These are epistemic non-absolutism and epistemic pluralism. Boghossian states that epistemic non-absolutism is the position that “...there are no absolute facts about what a particular item of information justifies.”\textsuperscript{24} In the epistemic pluralist form, “[t]here are many fundamentally different, genuinely alternative systems, but no facts by virtue of which one of these systems is more correct than any of the others.”\textsuperscript{25} Goldman is interested in these two particular forms of epistemic relativism because they are:

...fundamentally the thesis that there are no objective or absolute facts that make an epistemic system right or correct. If the justifiedness or unjustifiedness of beliefs and other doxastic states is linked in the indicated way to the objective rightness or correctness of a unique system of epistemic norms (E-system), then, if relativism is true, no objective status (for example, truth or falsity) attaches to the

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statements that a particular doxastic state is justified or unjustified, reasonable or unreasonable. Thus, epistemic relativism seems to be the equivalent to epistemic nihilism.\textsuperscript{26}

Goldman further notes that with the adoption of some kind of epistemic relativism, the whole issue of peer disagreement “melts away.”\textsuperscript{27}

E-relativism undercuts the entire dispute about reasonable disagreement. Agents who disagree in their attitudes toward a given proposition are not objectively unreasonable because, without an objectively correct E-system, their attitudes cannot be assessed as objectively unreasonable. At the same time, there can be no assessment of their attitudes as objectively reasonable or justified.\textsuperscript{28}

However, the adoption of epistemic relativism does have, for the most part, the consequence of introducing nihilism into matters regarding what it is epistemically rational and not epistemically rational to believe. As Goldman understands it, this nihilism implies that there is no objective rationality or irrationality to someone’s view. As such, Goldman believes epistemic relativism to be un-respectable.\textsuperscript{29}

However Boghossian notes that there is a “seductively powerful” argument in favour of epistemic relativism.\textsuperscript{30} “Notice”, says Boghossian, “…how concessive such a view can afford to be to… objectivism about facts... Sure, there may be a

fact of the matter about whether the heavens are Copernican or Ptolemaic. But
there is no absolute fact of the matter, such a relativist may argue, about which of
those views it would be most rational for someone to have. The only absolute
truths in the vicinity are truths about what is permitted by this or that epistemic
system, with different people finding different epistemic systems attractive.”
Goldman quotes Barnes and Bloor: “For the relativist there is no sense attached to
the idea that some standards or beliefs are really rational as distinct from merely
locally accepted as such. [The relativist] thinks that there are no context-free or
super-cultural norms of rationality…” Goldman carries on to say that
“…philosophers would express the view by saying that there is no fact of the matter
about which community is (‘objectively’ or ‘absolutely’) right.” Indeed epistemic
relativism enjoys a rich and diverse intellectual heritage. A quote from
Wittgenstein proves the point:

608. Is it wrong for me to be guided in my actions by the propositions of physics?
Am I to say that I have no good ground for doing so? Isn’t precisely this what we
call a ‘good ground’?

609. Supposing we met people who did not regard that as a telling reason. Now,
how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for
that we consider them primitive.) Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be
guided by it?—If we call this ‘wrong’ aren’t we using our language-game as a base
from which to combat theirs?

32 Barnes, B., and Bloor, D., (1982), Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge,
in brackets.
Feldman, R., and Warfield, T., A., Oxford University Press, 188.
610. And are we right or wrong to combat it? Of course there are all sorts of slogans which will be used to support our proceedings.

611. Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic.

612. I said I would ‘combat’ the other man,—but wouldn’t I offer him reasons? Certainly, but how far would they go? At the end of reasons comes persuasion. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)

5.4) The Problem of Norm Circularity

I shall outline and ultimately reject one argument that Boghossian provides against epistemic relativism. This argument concerns norm circularity. In this section I explain the problem of norm circularity, and in the next examine how Boghossian deals with it. Boghossian asks us to think of what Wittgenstein says in On Certainty at 609, and claims that:

...there are two different ways of hearing this charge of Wittgenstein’s, one of which is less threatening to epistemic absolutism than the other.

On the less threatening interpretation, we could understand him to say: well, although you may have shown something about the superiority of your system over your opponents’, your demonstration is dialectically ineffective: your opponents will remain thoroughly unpersuaded and they would have every right to do so since your demonstration begs the question against them. You may have shown something substantive by your lights, but not by theirs...

But there is a more potent reading of Wittgenstein's charge according to which our argument would not have shown anything about the correctness of our own system, even by *our own lights*, and not just by the lights of our opponents.

The point is that *we ourselves* seem to acknowledge that we cannot hope to demonstrate the correctness of an epistemic system by using *that very system*. As Richard Fumerton has put it,

...there is no philosophically interesting notion of justification or knowledge that would allow us to use a kind of reasoning to justify the legitimacy of using that reasoning.\(^{35}\)

Boghossian takes up this final point of Fumerton’s and argues for the legitimacy of epistemic absolutism through self-justification, but at first notes the power of the problem he is faced with:

If we really do take our confrontation with an alien epistemic system to throw our system into doubt, and so to call for a genuine justification of that system, how could we possibly hope to advance that project by showing that our system is ruled correct by itself? If we have reason to doubt whether our principles yield genuinely justified beliefs, why should we be comforted by the fact that we can construct an argument in their favour that relies on them? To doubt them is precisely to doubt the value of the beliefs that are arrived at on their basis.

If these considerations are right... we consequently have to concede that, if there are objective facts about justification, those facts are in principle unknowable.\(^{36}\)

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Boghossian believes that if this agnosticism regarding the know-ability of epistemic principles is correct, then the relativist wins the argument. There is a sense in which this is true; Boghossian states that “[i]f the point is to decide which of the two practices is better than the other, self-certification is not going to help. Each side will be able to provide a norm-circular justification of its own practice; neither side will be able to say anything more... We seem left with no choice but to say, as Wittgenstein does in his *Philosophical Investigations*:

> If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached my bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”

One point we might immediately make is that in such a situation, the relativist will not have shown that there are multiple correct E-systems. The absolutist has failed to show that there is one objectively justified system. However this does not guarantee that there is not a uniquely correct E-system, or that all E-systems are equally valid. A failed argument for the existence of God does not indicate that God does not exist. Although the relativist will remain un-refuted, the relativist cannot claim victory. A further and perhaps more interesting point is that if we concede that norm circularity prevents justification, then facts about justification are only in principle unknowable only on the stronger sense of knowledge. The weaker sense of knowledge does not include justification. In chapter 2, I noted that many authors speak of knowledge as simply requiring true

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belief, and not justification. Knowledge of objective facts about justification, when knowledge is used in the weaker sense, is still in principle possible.

However, many advocates of epistemic absolutism, including Boghossian will be unhappy with the above situation. Many do not proceed with the weaker sense of knowledge, and although the relativist will not have shown epistemic relativism to be true, the objectivist will be unhappy with the absence of any meaningful notion of epistemic justification. The absolutist may understandably consider himself to be in a spot of bother; the absolutist, much like the foundationalist, cannot point to any ‘first principle’ which can be supposed to transcend all, or at least all known societies and epistemic systems. Boghossian’s response to this problem is to argue that norm-circularity is not a problem for the absolutist.

5.5) Norm Circularity as Unproblematic

Boghossian starts with the claim that “[a]ll parties to this dispute should agree that each thinker is blindly entitled to his own epistemic system—each thinker is entitled to use the epistemic system he finds himself with, without first having to supply antecedent justification for the claim that it is the correct system.”


Boghossian further notes that:

If no one is entitled to use an epistemic system without first justifying it, then no one could be entitled to use an epistemic system, for any attempt by the thinker to justify it will depend on his being entitled to use some epistemic system or other...
But some form of blind (unsupported) entitlement to fundamental parts of one’s epistemic system is clearly unavoidable. ⁴⁰

As such, when one encounters a “coherent, fundamental, genuine alternative to our epistemic system”⁴¹ one would reason about this system, “...just as we would about any other subject matter, using our own epistemic system. And wouldn’t we be perfectly entitled to do so...?”⁴² Boghossian’s response is that one ought not to rely on:

...an overly general application of Fumerton’s claim about norm-circular arguments.

Fumerton’s claim, that we cannot hope to justify our principles through the use of those very principles is not true in general; it is only true in the special, albeit important, case where we have legitimately come to doubt the correctness of our own principles. In the absence of any legitimate reason to doubt them, though, we would be perfectly entitled to rely on them in justifying our system over theirs, just as we would be entitled to rely on them in reasoning about any other subject matter.”⁴³

However one problem remains for Boghossian; imagine an entity that did not have an epistemic system at all, and who was simultaneously presented with two competing epistemic systems.⁴⁴ Such an individual wouldn’t be epistemically justified in preferring one system over the other. We might remark that in such a situation there is no way for the agent in question to prefer one system over the

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⁴⁴ Some may question whether or not such an entity could qualify as an epistemic agent, or whether or not a being without a de facto epistemic system was a possibility. I do not intend to argue for the possibility of such a being. The point of the thought experiment is merely illustrative.
other on neutral, epistemic grounds: if the agent points to the coherence of one system over the other, then the agent is privileging and working within a system that favours coherence. Perhaps the agent will point to some evidence which indicates the truth of one system over another, but if this is so, the agent is already working within a system that privileges the use of evidence when reasoning. As such, only for non-epistemic reasons can the agent in question prefer one system to the other, and avoid the charge of already working with an epistemic system. This indicates that although one might be blindly entitled to prefer an epistemic system over another, or entitled to use the epistemic system they find themselves with, one is only pragmatically justified in doing so, not epistemically justified: the entitlement is practical, not epistemic. This in turn indicates that one epistemic system cannot be epistemically justified, let alone epistemically ranked, versus an alternative epistemic system. With this in mind, Wittgenstein’s comment becomes all the more relevant:

217. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached my bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”

5.6) Non-Epistemic Reasons

Elgin has an answer, though it is just as potent for the epistemic relativist as it is for the absolutist:

David Lewis believed that infinitely many possible worlds exist, each of them just as real as the actual world. There is no denying that he believes this. Moreover, there

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is no denying that he was incredibly smart, philosophically gifted, and intellectually responsible. He examined the arguments for and against his position with enormous care. It is no false modesty for me to say that David Lewis was a far better philosopher than I am. Nevertheless, I think he was wrong. I cannot refute his position; it is admirably well defended. But, despite Lewis’s intelligence and arguments, I do not believe that there exist real possible worlds, consisting of material objects and inaccessible from the actual world...

...I think it is exceedingly unlikely that I enjoy any sort of philosophical insight that Lewis lacked (except, perhaps for the utterly question-begging insight that I am right and he is wrong, which even if it is true is utterly question-begging). Nor can I conclude, as advocates of resoluteness think I should, that in this case Lewis’s reasoning is flawed. The position is amply, publicly, brilliantly defended. The number of able philosophers who cannot find a defect in the argument is legion. And, in response to an endless barrage of criticisms and incredulous stares, Lewis re-examined his position often. Granted there may nevertheless be an extremely subtle flaw in Lewis’s reasoning. But, on the available evidence, it is sheer hubris to insist that there must be...

The solution is this: despite the fact that Lewis’s position is brilliantly constructed, admirably defended, and beautifully argued, I find it incredible. I simply cannot believe it. Since ‘ought’ implies ‘can,’ that I cannot believe it entails that it is not the case that I ought to believe it.  

I cannot believe, given my current material and cultural context that there are multiple, equally valid, genuine, fundamental epistemic systems. I cannot show

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that I am right on neutral epistemic grounds. But I am an epistemic absolutist through and through. I do not know whether the principle(s) by which one epistemic system can be preferred to another can be known, but I do know that on pain of circularity that they cannot be epistemic principles. If they are not epistemic principles, then any epistemic value arrived at on their basis is arrived at ex-nihilo. As such I have reached my bedrock, and my spade is turned. This is simply what I believe, and I cannot believe otherwise.

Consequently, my theory of intellectual expertise will presuppose the truth of epistemic absolutism concerning the nature of justification. This move is necessary in order prevent my entire conception of intellectual expertise being rendered obsolete.

5.7) Epistemic Absolutism and Peer Disagreement

Epistemic absolutists have a habit of talking about evidence. Take for example Feldman’s claim that “…evidence uniquely determines one correct attitude [toward any given proposition],”47 or Goldman’s explanation of epistemic absolutism: “The idea is that a belief or another doxastic state is justified or unjustified as long as it conforms or fails to conform to what is prescribed by the correct E-system, given the subject’s evidence.”48 Let us presume that epistemic absolutism is in fact true. The mere truth that there is one uniquely correct E-system does not inform us as to which E-system is indeed the correct E-system. There may, we might imagine, be

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epistemic systems both genuine and fundamental which make no recourse to
evidence at all in any way, shape or form. Of course we might not want to adopt
such a system, or pay it much mind, but insofar as Feldman’s formulation of the
uniqueness thesis depends upon evidence, it will only apply to those epistemic
systems which privilege the role of evidence in reasoning.

However Feldman can be read as suggesting that no matter what system
one is utilising, when two peers utilise that one same system and come to
alternative attitudes regarding an issue, that both cannot be simultaneously or
equally epistemically justified.

A related question is this: can two separate calculators both come to a
‘correct’ conclusion to the sum ‘7-8’? In this example, the calculators offer two
distinct answers, with one calculator answering ‘0’ and another answering ‘-1’, but
both calculators adopt the same operating procedure. Before we attempt to
answer this question about the calculators, let me explain why system is italicised.
According to Boghossian, for an epistemic system to really count as an epistemic
system it has to be coherent. As such, for a system to really count as a system it
will have to avoid arbitrary distinctions and inconsistent verdicts. Boghossian
believes that “each of these norms of coherence can be shown to flow relatively
directly from the very nature of an epistemic system, as a system of principles that
is designed to tell us what there is a reason to believe; and I don’t think we would
so much understand someone who pretended to believe that incoherence in an

50 For other ways in which a system can be incoherent, see, Boghossian, P., (2006) Fear of
epistemic system is a virtue rather than a vice.” For a system to count as a system there would have to be a fixed prescribed method, way or procedure, even if only a very thin or simple procedure, for coming to a belief which is justified given that system. As such, when two peers or calculators disagree and are operating within the same system—applying the same methodology based on the same information—one of the two peers, so the claim goes, has made a mistake.

5.8) Disagreement Between Calculators

When I was in my fourth year of junior school (at about eight years old I think), the class was set the task of doing our ‘Daily 10’. The ‘Daily 10’ was a series of quick math questions to start off the day with. I remember that one morning I was checking the marks that my teacher, Mr Smith, had given to my ‘Daily 10’ answers from the previous day: I noted with particular concern a question which I had not received a tick for. I do not remember the question exactly, but it was something along the lines of ‘7-8’ or ‘5-6’. I recall that at first I had marked the answer as 0, but, remembering back to the math lesson from the week before and what I had learned about negative numbers, I instead crossed out the 0, and put -1. I also remembered from the week before that Mrs Rosen, our math teacher, had difficulty explaining to us how negative numbers were possible. At the time most of the class seem to have trouble with understanding how there could possibly be a number that was less than 0. After all, we were only 8. Mrs Rosen asked us to

52 And now that I reflect on it, even 0 is not really a number: it is the absence of a number or quantity.
think of a car park, with an above and a below ground section. The value of -1 could, for instance, refer to the basement or underground floors of the car park, whereby the ground floor was ‘0’, and the floors above ground were ‘+1’ or ‘+2’. This made sense to most of us I think. When I queried with Mr Smith why it was that he had seen fit to mark my answer of -1 incorrectly, he responded that the answer of -1 was silly, because there was no way in which there could be an answer less than 0.

Even now I can think of a third answer, which would be to not answer the question at all with a number, but instead go on claiming that the question cannot be answered, or that the question does not make sense. One cannot take 6 from 5, or 8 from 7, since the amount I am to deduct is greater than that which I am to deduct from. Imagine if you had five marbles, and you said to me, take six. The most I could take is five, and not six: there isn’t six marbles to take, thus the sum cannot be done. The answer isn’t 0; the answer is that one cannot deduct 6 from 5 because it is impossible.

When thinking up the answer to this question now, as I remember back over the principles in operation from each of my teacher’s calculations, I can see how both answers could be thought rational, and perhaps even this third answer. The first answer privileges in its working a *theoretical framework* of understanding which concerns the use of negative numbers, suspending from judgement the logical maxim ‘*that there cannot be less than nothing*’. In the second answer given by Mr Daniel Smith his point was grounded on an exact and basic logical maxim, which I would not dispute, that there cannot be less than nothing. And so -1 cannot possibly be correct, for the number cannot and does not exist; it is an outright
incoherent concept. Likewise, the third answer operates on the idea that one
cannot take more than what there is: I cannot take six marbles from five because
one cannot get something out of nothing. Again, a maxim I would not dispute.

I can see the sense in each of these answers, and I would call each answer rational. If someone provided me with any one of these three answers, I would not consider them irrational, and as they explained the reasoning to me, I would be forced to admit there was sense to their position. Different people weigh the importance of logical maxims differently. They also take into account the way to proceed differently. There does seem to be genuine differences in calculation or judgement, and therefore answer, each of which can be called rational in some meaningful sense. Such answers are not clearly facetious or in some other way insincere or inappropriate. Neither are the answers clearly absurd.

However, this example does not meet Feldman’s point. In this example there is no clear priority as to which principle is overriding, be it the theoretical framework concerning negative numbers, the principle concerning the impossibility of there being less than nothing, or finally, the principle that one cannot acquire ex-nihilo. If there existed a priority regarding which principle was overriding in the case of this question, and both peers still disagreed regarding the conclusion, then, absent any other disagreement regarding methodology, at least what one of the two peers believes is epistemically irrational. I suspect on this latter point that Feldman is correct. However what can be doubted is Feldman’s advice concerning how one should proceed in the face of peer disagreement. It is with this concern that I shall now finish the chapter. If the two peers cannot agree on the operating
procedure and answer, then according to Feldman, the peers ought to suspend judgment:

We can now ask which factor should be weighed more heavily... they can discuss those reasons and come to a conclusion about which is more significant. If not, then they should acknowledge that they do not really have good reasons for weighing them as they do and thus for coming to their preferred conclusions. To think otherwise requires thinking that, in effect they get their preferred ways to weigh the factors for “free”— they do not need reasons for these preferences. But I see no reason at all to grant them this license.

A related idea is that people may have different fundamental principles or world views... Maybe acceptance of a scientific world view is one such fundamental principle. Maybe a religious one is another. Or, maybe there are some more fundamental principles from which differences emerge... [W]hatever they are, I do not think that they will help to solve the problem. Once people have engaged in a full discussion of issues, their different starting points will be apparent. And then those claims will themselves be open for discussion and evaluation. These different starting points help to support the existence of reasonable disagreements only if each side can reasonably maintain its starting point after they have been brought out into the open.  

5.9) Suspending Belief

The conciliatory position is that when two peers disagree, they ought to ‘split the difference’. This involves the two peers adjusting their degrees of belief to take into account

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account the fact that a peer, someone regarded as an epistemic equal, concludes differently on the same issue. Alternatively one can suspend judgement on this issue altogether. The reasoning behind this outcome is that it cannot be said for sure that it is the other rather than I who has made a mistake. However, the conciliatory position is not obviously correct.

One problem is that advocates of the conciliatory position take for granted that the value of error avoidance is always greater than the value of possibly believing a truth. Or perhaps the claim is instead that we ought only to believe that which we can epistemically justifiably believe. Either way, when two peers disagree about whether P, there are more or less three available options regarding belief; sticking to one’s guns, deference to their peer, or suspending judgement. Two of these options, sticking to one’s guns or deferring to one’s peer offer a chance of being correct because it’s either the case that P or it is not the case that P. The option that does not offer a chance of being correct about P is suspending judgement. It is in this sense that the conciliatory position seems to value the guarantee of avoiding error above the chance of being correct. However it is unclear that there is greater value in guaranteeing the absence of error than a 50% chance of being correct; especially if I am convinced of my position.

A related point regards the idea that there is intrinsic value not only in truth, but in finding the truth for ourselves. Zagzebski asks:

Would we think that the subject who gets to the truth through the direct use of her own powers deserves more credit for reaching the truth when that method is a less...
reliable strategy than taking the belief on authority? If you think the answer is yes, then you must think that the value of believing by relying upon ourselves and not others is not just a constraint on the aim of true belief; it is an independent value. And it is not only an independent value, it trumps the value of true belief.\textsuperscript{55}

There is a point to be made here about what to do in the face of peer disagreement. If we are not only interested in having true beliefs, but having acquired truths ourselves, one might want to favour sticking to one’s guns. When presented with the 100% chance of avoiding error, and a 50% chance of getting an answer right or wrong, if there is more value in getting an answer right through self-reliance, then there is a further reason for one stick to one’s guns. At the same time there is a diminished reason to defer since to defer is to take a view on authority. The value of self-reliance suggests a justifiable course of action is sticking to one’s guns. The justification comes from assigning value to the agents own epistemic endeavours, and not assigning an overriding epistemic value to either truth or the avoidance of error irrespective of how that truth or error avoidance is obtained. As such, the conciliatory position is not obviously correct. Moreover, there is a further problem with the conciliatory position as outlined by the following conundrum:

You and I are epistemologists, and we are epistemic peers. Available to us we have a single body of evidence which we both use to support our claims.\textsuperscript{56} We discover that while I affirm P, you believe that not P. As a fan of the conciliatory position I dutifully suspend judgement, but you do not. You go on sticking to your


\textsuperscript{56} Since we are peers, we’ve had equally similar access to the evidence, time to ponder it, similar cognitive capabilities, and other relevant miscellaneous similarities.
guns about not P. At this point you and I discover a further disagreement about what to do in the face of peer disagreement. You claim that one should stick to one’s guns, while I believe that one should suspend judgement. Now I am presented with a problem: should I suspend judgement about whether or not to suspend judgement (and therefore stick to my guns), or should I stick to my guns about suspending judgement, and thus stick to my guns through a suspension of judgement? In this situation, the conciliatory position has no hope of being the right course of action: the conciliatory position ends up in a lose-lose situation, where one cannot help but stick to one’s guns.

5.10) Summary

In this chapter I argued that that theory of intellectual expertise need not respond to problems of peer disagreement. This is because experts need not necessarily be peers, and peers necessarily experts. Further, the separate issue of expert disagreement does not get off the ground: intellectual expertise does not presuppose the possession of any truths whatsoever.

Moreover, I reviewed the uniqueness thesis, which is the claim that “… a body of evidence justifies at most one proposition out of a competing set of propositions (e.g., one theory out of a bunch of exclusive alternatives) and that it justifies at most one attitude toward any particular proposition.” I explained that the truth of the uniqueness thesis turns on the debate between epistemic relativism and epistemic absolutism. Further, my theory of intellectual expertise

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must presuppose a position of epistemic absolutism to have bite: if there is no truth concerning which proposition or evidence justifies any particular conclusion, then intellectual expertise becomes meaningless.

In outlining the arguments in favour of epistemic relativism, I cover Wittgenstein. I also cover Boghossian’s attempts to keep epistemic relativism at bay. These arguments concern the difficulty, if not impossibility, of showing how it is that one epistemic system can be justified without circular arguments, let alone be epistemically ranked against another competing system. This however does not concede that the epistemic relativist is correct, but only that the epistemic absolutist cannot epistemically defend epistemic absolutism in a non-question begging way. However, following Elgin’s lead, we may be able to offer non-epistemic reasons for preferring epistemic absolutism. Where I cannot doubt epistemic absolutism, I ought not to doubt it.\(^{58}\)

I defend the view that my theory of intellectual expertise will need to presume the truth of epistemic absolutism. Proceeding within a framework of epistemic absolutism secures the foothold needed to give epistemic rationality bite. With this in mind, I then ask whether peer disagreement is possible. I argue that when two peers use exactly the same principles in the same priority, and disagree, that at least one of the two peers does not believe in a way which is epistemically rational.

However there is an additional question that should be responded to. When two peers find themselves in disagreement, what should they do? Suspend

judgement, stick to their guns or defer to their peer? I argued that anyone who suggests that the suspension of judgement is the course of preference must think the value of avoiding error is greater than a 50% chance of believing a truth. If P is either true or not true and I can: believe P, not believe P, or suspend judgement about whether to believe P, then only the option of suspending judgement guarantees that I will not believe the truth about P. Moreover, if one were to believe that there is additional credit or merit in having come to a true belief oneself, a position common to virtue epistemologists, then of the two options which provide a chance of truth, sticking to one’s guns is preferable. This may go some way to explaining why it is that intellectual experts often seem to passionately disagree, and rarely budge.
Chapter 6: Intellectual Expertise and Epistemic Success

Normally we think of someone who has gained non-trivial knowledge as having achieved epistemically. Yet throughout my thesis I have argued that intellectual expertise cannot be understood as presupposing the truth of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. To do so renders intellectual expertise chimerical and quixotic. As such, the theory of intellectual expertise gets by without recourse to knowledge. However, this might seem to imply that intellectual experts, at least historically, may not be all that epistemically successful. The beliefs of many past historical experts have in fact turned out to be incorrect. So in many cases, what was taken to be known was in fact not known at all, merely justifiably believed. So long as we think of epistemic achievement in terms of truth attainment alone, intellectual expertise will not guarantee epistemic success.

In this chapter I argue that this concern regarding the quixotic and chimerical is not limited to intellectual expertise; worryingly, it is a problem generally embedded within traditional epistemology. In response to this concern, I argue that intellectual experts do have a claim to epistemic success—in particular, what I term ‘weak’ epistemic success. I further argue that weak epistemic success can be meaningfully understood without recourse to truth.

I will firstly clarify some of the terms and expressions I will use throughout this chapter, including why I adopt the terminology I do. I will secondly outline the traditional aim of epistemology and inquiry more generally. I will contrast these aims with the bleak epistemic situation certain philosophers ascribe to us. I then
move forward to argue that given our epistemic situation, our epistemic facticity, we may be interested in distinguishing the ‘finest’ kind of epistemic success from ‘weak’ epistemic success. I argue that one reason we should be interested in the move to weak epistemic success is reconciliation of our intuitions about epistemic success, intellectual expertise, and the number of intellectual experts we typically believe we have within our societies. Another reason concerns our own epistemic purposes of having robust theories. Lastly, I argue that epistemic credit is a function of epistemic justification, and not truth.

6.1) Terms

By aim or goal I shall mean the desired end or good. If the aim or goal of boiling the kettle is to make some tea then the tea is the desired end or good, and boiling the kettle is a means to that end. I shall say that one is successful when one achieves one’s goal. If one’s goal is to make some tea, and other things equal one indeed does make some tea, one has been successful in one’s goal. Other things equal is an important caveat here. Imagine for instance that one does in fact make tea, but at some great financial cost. Although one would have successfully made tea, which was in fact one’s goal, it may be the case that the cost of the tea is a serious and perhaps unacceptable drawback; this consideration moves us to question whether or not tea and tea alone is the only relevant goal, even when it is the only stated goal. I accommodate for this kind of consideration with the caveat ‘other things equal’.
When I use the term credit, it will relate to what is praiseworthy or merit-worthy. For example, other things equal, solving a complex mathematical problem is praiseworthy, and as such one deserves credit for having solved it. The kind of credit involved in this case is epistemic credit.

Later in this chapter I will distinguish between two separate kinds of epistemic success. I call the first the ‘finest kind’ of epistemic success, and I call the second ‘weak’ epistemic success. I claim that the ‘finest kind’ of epistemic success can be understood as requiring more than justified true belief. It may include, for instance, solutions to deal with Gettier cases, apply only to non-trivial propositions and require that any particular knowledge is acquired in a certain way. By contrast, ‘weak’ epistemic success pertains to a version of epistemic success that gets by without truth. Toward any proposition one may possess either the finest kind of epistemic success, or weak epistemic success, or neither of the the above.

### 6.2) Two Traditional Aims

Truth is typically seen by modern philosophers as either the goal of philosophical inquiry specifically or as a fundamental goal of inquiry more generally. Traditionally truth has been one of the primary goals of philosophy.¹ David notes that Descartes, Chisholm, Moser, Foley, Lehrer, Goldman, Sosa, and Plantinga, each epistemologists from various “...approaches to epistemology—foundationalism,

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¹ As was indicated within the previous chapter, some more modern philosophers favour an anti-classical view. Moreover, research products are often funded with commercialisation in mind, indicating that the ‘search for knowledge’ or ‘truth’ is not necessarily an exclusive or final goal of those performing or funding the inquiry. Additionally, for a discussion concerning verisimilitude, see chapter 9.
A Theory of Intellectual Expertise

cohereicisim, reliabilism, virtue epistemology, and proper-function...” can each be tied to the view that truth is an important goal of inquiry. Take BonJour for example:

What makes us cognitive beings at all is our capacity for belief, and the goal of our distinctively cognitive endeavour is truth: We want our beliefs to correctly and accurately depict the world... The basic role of justification is that of a means to truth, a more directly attainable mediating link between our subjective starting point and our objective goal... If epistemic justification were not conducive to truth in this way, if finding epistemically justified beliefs did not substantially increase the likelihood of finding true ones, then epistemic justification would be irrelevant to our main cognitive goal and of dubious worth... The distinguishing characteristic of epistemic justification is thus its essential or internal relation to the cognitive goal of truth. It follows that one’s cognitive endeavours are justified only if and to the extent that they are aimed at this goal, which means very roughly that one accepts all and only those beliefs one has good reason to think are true.

A couple of important caveats already need mentioning: only certain truths, or rather a certain class of truths can be properly said to count as engendering epistemic success. If this was not the case, then reading a phone-book to memorise the numbers could very well serve as a meaningful pursuit of truth. But phone-book reading is rarely thought valuable even when all the numbers inside are correct. Sosa confirms this point with the following:

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Suppose you enter your dentist’s waiting room and find all the magazines missing.

Deprived of reading matter, you’re sure to doze off, but you need no sleep. Are you then rationally bound to reach for the telephone book in pursuit of truth?

Were you not to do so, you would forfeit a chance to pluck some desired goods within easy reach.

If random telephone numbers does not elicit a wide enough yawn, consider a randomly selected cubit foot of the Sahara. Here is a trove of facts, of the form \( \text{grain } x \text{ is so many millimetres in direction } D \text{ from grain } y \), than which few can be of less interest. Or take some bit of trivia known to me at the moment: that is was sunny in Rhode Island at noon on October 21, 1999. I confess that I will not rue my loss of this information, nor do I care either \textit{that} or \textit{how} early it will be gone.\(^4\)

The second important caveat concerns the manner of one’s truth acquisition. Zagzebski notes that some epistemologists assign greater epistemic merit to individuals who have attained certain truths through the use of their own powers, rather than through mere deference to the epistemic authority of others.\(^5\)

Zagzebski further states that:

\begin{quote}
I am among those epistemologists who argue that what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief is something like getting credit for the truth acquired. Roughly, the knower merits the truth rather than merely acquiring the truth. If that is right, then we should ask ourselves whether she gets more credit the more she relies upon her own powers. If she does, then the aim of knowledge and the aim of true belief can come apart. The aim of truth would lead her to adopt the strategy of taking many beliefs from others, whereas the aim of knowledge would
\end{quote}


lead her not to do so even she is more likely to get the truth by relying upon others. That would be a very peculiar consequence. As I have said, I do not think this is a problem with the credit account of knowledge since my position is that the subject gets credit for getting the truth when she uses the best strategy available to her for getting the truth even when it involves relying upon others, but it is interesting to notice that if epistemic credit arises from self-reliance, and epistemic credit distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief, the aim of knowledge can oppose the aim of true belief.6

I have sympathy with the view that there is more credit in having come to a truth through a non-wayward use of one’s own powers than there is through mere deference or luck. There can be no doubt that when an individual comes to a justified true belief (plus some relevant anti-Gettier condition) concerning some difficult but interesting proposition, having relied solely on the non-wayward use of their own intellectual powers that they will have achieved the finest kind of epistemic success there is. So truth, with caveats in place, is seen as one of the two traditional aims of epistemology.

The other traditional goal has been knowledge. Truth is a part of knowledge. However in recent years epistemologists have placed additional emphasis on the goal of truth rather than knowledge:

Knowledge, the epistemic concept par excellence, is usually defined in terms of belief, truth, and some other epistemic concept, say, justification: S knows p iff p is true, S believes p, and S is justified in believing p in a manner that meets a suitable anti-Gettier condition. Belief and truth, although fundamental to epistemology are

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not themselves epistemic concepts. They are the nonepistemic ingredients in knowledge. This means epistemology is not responsible for them; that is, as far as epistemology is concerned, belief and truth are given and can be invoked to account for epistemic concepts. The distinctly epistemic ingredient in knowledge is justification: the concept of S’s being justified in believing p.\(^7\)

The reason for the focus on truth rather than knowledge is to anchor epistemology onto non-epistemic concepts:

Although knowledge is certainly no less desirable than true belief, the knowledge-goal is at a disadvantage here because it does not fit into this picture in any helpful manner. Invoking the knowledge-goal would insert the concept of knowledge right into the specification of the goal, which would then no longer provide an independent anchor for understanding epistemic concepts.\(^8\)

For our purposes, whichever goal is chosen as the prominent or proper epistemic goal is largely irrelevant: both require truth as a necessary ingredient in epistemic success. If epistemic success is a matter of either true belief or justified true belief, then truth is the goal. It follows that if truth is problematic, both knowledge and true belief will share equal measure of the problems associated with truth. At this stage, David continues to think carefully about the theoretical roles and differences in epistemology between truth, justification and knowledge. In an analogy to ethics, David states that:

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Epistemology treats justified belief somewhat like ethics treats right action:

Holding a justified belief is like holding a belief in the right kind of way. Truth is treated in analogy to the good—truth is, as it were, the good as for as epistemology is concerned. Note that Knowledge does not show up as a goal here at all. Knowledge is just the state of having reached the truth goal in the right kind of way. This picture presents truth as the epistemic goal, meaning that, for the purposes of epistemological theorizing, the truth-goal is to be treated as an ultimate goal and as the only ultimate goal. Justification is to be explained somehow by relating it to the truth goal; hence, it is not an ultimate epistemic goal. Knowledge is not a goal at all as far as epistemology is concerned; it is not an epistemic goal. This picture, the picture of truth as the epistemic goal reflects the intuition that epistemic concerns are, at bottom, all about truth. Whether it is a good picture of epistemology would seem to depend in large part on whether the truth-goal can really play the part assigned to it. 9

Similarly, Sosa employs an analogy between archery and belief when thinking about the aim of epistemology:

When an archer takes aim and shoots, that shot is assessable in three respects.

First, we can assess whether it succeeds in its aim, in hitting the target.

Although we can also assess how accurate a shot it is, how close to the bull’s-eye, we here put degrees aside, in favour of the on/off question: whether it hits the target or not.

Second, we can assess whether it is adroit, whether it manifests the skill on the part of the archer. Skill too comes in degrees, but here again we focus on the

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on/off question: whether it manifests the relevant skill or not, whether it is adroit or not.

A shot can be both accurate and adroit, however, without being a success creditable to its author. Take a shot that in normal conditions would have hit the bull’s-eye. The wind may be abnormally strong, and just strong enough to divert the arrow so that, in conditions thereafter normal, it would miss the target altogether. However, shifting winds may next guide it gently to the bull’s-eye after all. The shot is then accurate and adroit, but not accurate because adroit (not sufficiently). So it is not apt, and not creditable to the archer.  

Sosa continues much later: “A shot is apt if and only if its accuracy is due “sufficiently” to the archer’s adroitness.” In these terms, epistemic success would be a matter of aptitude.

My concern is with the achievability of truth as an epistemic aim. Truth may serve well for the theoretical purpose of anchoring epistemic concepts, but does it serve well for practical purposes? If success is a matter of goal attainment, and truth is the proper epistemic goal, then epistemic success presupposes truth. However as I have argued so far, truth can be a very tough mark to hit; at least for philosophers it is among the grandest of all aims, superseded perhaps only by knowledge. Sosa equates accuracy with hitting the mark of objective truth.

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12 The reason for why knowledge only ‘might’ supersede true belief is because there are serious issues regarding the value of justified true belief, as opposed to mere true belief. This problem is sometimes called the Meno problem. Knowledge will only be able to supersede true belief on epistemic grounds if justification is considered to be an epistemic good in itself, or where an epistemic goal is understood to imply more than a purely veritistic goal.
Objective truth is the target.\textsuperscript{13} However the truth of a matter may often be obscure. The target may not be in plain sight. If epistemic success entails aptitude as understood by Sosa, then in some cases I may be asked to (1) fire a shot which manifests my skill, (2) manifests a sufficient quantity of skill so that if the target is hit, that the shot can be properly attributed to me, and (3) that it hits a target, which given my circumstances, I may not even be able to either see or recognise.\textsuperscript{14} Given the historical circumstances of some thinkers there is little reason to think that they had a reasonable chance of hitting a large quantity of truths within certain domains. In certain cases, perhaps even our own epistemic circumstances diminish our truth detection chances. Even if we were to think it reasonable that we in our present information age setting were able to come to a great quantity of truths within all known domains, there would still be a chance of our being wrong in this thought. In Foley’s *Working without a Net* the epistemic situation we all find ourselves in is aptly described:

> What am I to believe? I cannot simply read off from the world what is true, nor can I unproblematically rely upon the acknowledged experts or the received traditions to guide me towards the truth. I instead must marshal my own resources. I must marshal them to determine by my own lights what is true and who is reliable and what if anything is defensible about the intellectual traditions of my community. In this respect the individualism of Descartes has won the day.

> What we find unacceptable in Descartes is his unguarded optimism. We think it naïve. We no longer think that by properly marshaling our resources we


\textsuperscript{14} This refers to an ancient pre-Socratic problem, discussed in *Meno*. It concerns whether or not someone can identify P without already knowing something about what P is. For example, how can I know there is an issue of justice here, without already knowing at least something about justice?
can be assured of the truth. Being sufficiently reflective and sufficiently cautious is no guarantee that we will avoid error. It is not even a guarantee of reliability. Even so, philosophical problems come down to us through time, and today we remain under the spell of the epistemological aspirations of our philosophical ancestors. The cure is to remind ourselves that their aims need not be ours. What they took to be an intellectual problem in need of solution we can appreciate as part of the human condition. Given the kind of creatures that we are and the kind of intellectual methods available to us, we cannot help but lack guarantees of the sort they sought. This is no more a problem for us than is that of finding a way to do without oxygen. We just are creatures who need oxygen. Similarly, the lack of intellectual guarantees is just a part of that condition. The problem is how to react to that condition.15

In the previous chapters I reacted to that condition—a condition of non-omniscience, mortality, subjectivity, divided intellectual labour and limited intellectual resources—by acknowledging that intellectual expertise does not presuppose knowledge, and in particular that intellectual expertise constituting beliefs need not be true. Instead I refocused intellectual expertise away from the often lofty prerequisite of truth and presented intellectual expertise in the mortal framework of epistemic rationality. I argued that without this refocusing, intellectual expertise risks becoming both vacuous and chimerical. My fear is that epistemic success also becomes vacuous and chimerical should it presuppose truth. Counter-intuitive it may be, but few intellectual experts may be epistemically successful if epistemic success necessarily entails truth.

6.3) A Mix of Intuitions

Intuitively, (1) we believe that there are many experts among us; heart surgeons, nuclear physicists, biologists, psychologists, and so the list might go on. Intuitively, (2) we also believe that these experts are epistemically successful. It is their epistemic success, we might think, that warrants their status as experts.

But if (3) epistemic success entails truth, which intuitively is the goal of inquiry, then we might be tempted to doubt our initial intuition about the number of experts in our society. Why? One reason is that the kind of true beliefs which would go toward making individuals in these fields expert are not trivial or easy to come by, especially given our epistemic facticity. Moreover, many of these so-called ‘true’ beliefs have in fact turned out to be incorrect. If history is anything to go by, we have reason to doubt that what is now taken to be known, will remain to be justifiably believed on epistemic grounds in the future. Consequently, these three intuitions do not sit well together; one of them has to be incorrect. Either (1) there really are very few, if any intellectual experts, and the whole idea of intellectual expertise is vacuous and in many cases practically unachievable. Or (2) intellectual experts are not necessarily epistemically successful, since to say they are epistemically successful is to say their beliefs are true which in turn consequently endangers intellectual expertise as a species.

An alternative path is to doubt intuition (3), and think that truth is not a prerequisite of all forms of epistemic success. From a practical standpoint, doubting either that (2) intellectual experts are epistemically successful or that (3) epistemic success is not necessarily a matter of truth attainment is the preferable
path. In my view both of these are preferable to denying that there really are very few intellectual experts (1). But which of the latter two is most preferable? Is it the case that intellectual expertise does not presuppose epistemic success; or is it the case that epistemic success is not a matter of truth? Or are both intuitions incorrect?

Before we try and navigate our way to an answer I should outline what some may take to be a fourth solution, which is to dismiss the whole idea that these intuitions do not fit well together: one might claim that truth really is not that lofty a goal. A plethora of domains in recent years have greatly advanced. On such a view we now live in a time of epistemic prosperity, and such prosperity is typically thought to apply to the natural sciences. There are two responses to make to such a claim: one such response is that theories about intellectual expertise or epistemic success cannot be held hostage to the epistemic situation of either one domain or of one time in history. Robust theories are able to provide at least some account for situations outside of the obvious and the present. Robust theories typically have ways of dealing with odd situations like the caveman examples, or future and past circumstances. Robust theories are not rendered obsolete by some trivial change in circumstance. If we want a robust general theory about epistemic success or intellectual expertise, we need to be aware that there are domains and epistemic circumstances in which these intuitions conflict.

A second response has us note that failure to understand that truth has been for some domains at sometimes a quixotic aim is really a failure to engage with the problems posed here in a serious way. Since Descartes we have been aware of the complete precariousness of our epistemic situation; it is such a
precariousness which leads many individuals new to epistemology to simply conclude that *we can know nothing* and that this is the end of the matter; that epistemology is rendered both obsolete and inept by scepticism. My entire approach throughout this thesis and my reason for adopting a framework of subjective foundationalism has been to demonstrate what it is that *we can do*. It has been to bite the bullet, not accept defeat, acknowledge our epistemic facticity, and provide a theory of intellectual expertise against a backdrop of epistemic precariousness. It has been to take a *can-do* approach to epistemology, despite the problems of our egocentricity:

There is no guarantee that by being egocentrically rational we will avoid error.

There is no guarantee that we will avoid extreme error. It need not even be probable that we will avoid extreme error. ¹⁶

Much of the implausibility of the Cartesian project arises from its failure to recognize that this is part of our intellectual condition. It instead insists that by being rational we can be assured of success. This has disastrous consequences for egocentric epistemology, since there is nothing we can do with respect to marshaling our cognitive resources that will result in such guarantees. However we marshal them, we will need the world to co-operate. ¹⁷

Taking a can-do approach to epistemology will require some bullet-biting. However one bullet we might not have to bite is a choice between the last two intuitions: between epistemic success entailing truth and intellectual experts being epistemically successful. One way of mediating between these two intuitions will

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be to soften our terminology. We may be interested in drawing a distinction between the finest kind of epistemic success that can be obtained, and between what I shall term ‘weak’ epistemic success, which by design will not be quite so demanding as the full bloodied finest kind. I mentioned before that the finest kind of epistemic success was a ‘justified true belief (plus some relevant anti-Gettier condition) concerning some difficult but interesting proposition, where one has relied solely on the non-wayward use of their own intellectual powers’. In order to get these intuitions about (1) the quantity of intellectual experts, (2) their epistemic success and (3) what epistemic success implies working coherently, we are going to have to unburden our conception of epistemic success from truth.

The crux of the problem between these intuitions is truth. Truth as a prerequisite of weak epistemic success will just not do. However this is as far as our unburdening need to go. We can leave in a conception of weak epistemic success the following: epistemic justification, belief, a requirement to deal with Gettier style cases, non-wayward acquisition, that the proposition in question be interesting or non-trivial, and that in some cases the belief is not taken on the basis of epistemic authority.\textsuperscript{18} What each of these requirements entails we can leave aside, so long as what is not entailed is the truth of the belief in question.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover we might note that someone who has in fact met each of these conditions is certainly not doing badly in epistemic terms. Given our epistemic starting point, a belief which satisfied all of these conditions certainly would not warrant the status of epistemic failure, even when not true.

\textsuperscript{18} Some virtue epistemologists such as Zagzebski pose questions concerning whether or not there is additional credit to be had in self-reliance.

\textsuperscript{19} Additionally, not all of these requirements may be necessary for a claim to weak epistemic success: for instance anti-Gettier conditions.
In understanding epistemic success in this weak way, we can reconcile the three intuitions: we can say that intellectual experts often have beliefs which are epistemically successful in a weak way. But we can also say that some might be epistemically successful in the finest kind of way too. This allows us to say that there is a sense in which intellectual experts may frequently be epistemically successful, albeit it in a weak sense. It allows us to say intellectual experts do in fact still warrant some epistemic credit, even when their beliefs are not true.

6.4) Epistemically Justified Belief and Epistemic Credit

Some people may be epistemically unlucky in their everyday life, like Janet from Nagel’s case concerning Janet and the location of her mobile phone:

...in (1) Janet knows (and a fortiori believes) that her mobile phone is in her handbag, remembering having seen it there a few moments before; in (2) Janet believes that her mobile phone is in her handbag, again remembering having seen it there a few moments before, but does not know that her mobile phone is in her handbag, because an extremely skilled pickpocket has just removed it without her noticing. 20

In situation (1) Janet has a justified true belief. In situation (2) Janet has a justified belief which is not true. However the change in situation (1) to (2) is absent any meaningful change in Janet’s reason for believing that her mobile phone is in her handbag. Her justification for her belief that her phone is in her handbag in both situations (1) and (2) is equally strong. Janet is very much the victim in case

(2) of epistemic bad luck, not to mention the bad luck of having had her phone stolen.

Going back to what Zagzebski said about credit: “I am among those epistemologists who argue that what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief is something like getting credit for the truth acquired. Roughly, the knower merits the truth rather than merely acquiring the truth. If that is right, then we should ask ourselves whether she gets more credit the more she relies upon her own powers.”\(^{21}\) In case (1) Janet merits her justified belief, and the belief in question just so happens to be true. Janet has done the work necessary, and merits the truth: after all, Janet has seen with her own eyes moments ago that her phone is in her handbag.\(^{22}\) In case (2) Janet still merits her justified belief, but the belief just so happens to no longer be true. Despite Janet having done the work necessary to normally possess a truth, she does not have one.

We should note that Janet’s reasons for belief are exactly the same in both cases. Additionally, the epistemic strength of her reason(s) for belief is both equivocal and excellent across cases. For any merit to have dissipated between case (1) and case (2) then the merit in question (much like the truth of her view) depends upon factors outside of her reasons for her belief. If this is true, the merit in question would not originate with the reason for why Janet believes that her phone is in her handbag. If this is true, then it’s hard to think of the merit as Janet’s merit in the first place. In fact it becomes hard to understand what is meant by merit at all. If the merit is to count as any sort of merit proper, I suspect that the

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\(^{22}\) For the sake of example, let us also note that there is nothing wrong with her eyesight. The conditions are such that other things are equal.
merit has to stay with Janet regardless of the location of the phone. The merit is
generated from the adroitness Janet displays when forming the belief that her
phone is in her handbag. Whether or not the belief in cases (1) or (2) is true, is in
fact irrelevant to whether or not Janet deserves credit for her belief. In this
situation, truth or falsity is just an incidental, luck-driven feature of Janet’s justified
credit-worthy belief. Her belief is credit-worthy despite not being true because it is
based upon the right sort of reason(s), in this case observation. The reason(s) has
sufficient epistemic strength. The belief is therefore epistemically credit-worthy.
Interestingly, Zagzebski’s account of when epistemic merit pertains has a bad luck
clause: “the agent generally gets credit for some kind for S even when B is false so
long as her intellectual motive sufficiently respects the importance of the truth of B,
she does what intellectually virtuous persons characteristically do in her
circumstances, and her belief is only false because of her bad luck.”

Of the three criteria of knowledge, two criteria do not change across the
examples; belief and justification. However belief in and of itself does not
engender epistemic merit. As such, any epistemic merit or credit must originate
in having certain reasons of a certain type or quality. This is because the merit or
credit, to count as such at all, must be founded upon Janet’s reasons for belief. As
such, the epistemic credit or merit lies in having something like a justified or
warranted belief. This could be a belief which is epistemically rational given the

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January, 12-28, 19, in footnotes.
24 Sometimes belief in and of itself can be of credit. Belief in God based on faith, absent evidence is
often taken to be of credit in religious communities. However, such credit is better called religious
or personal credit, not epistemic credit.
25 The type of reason to generate epistemic merit will need to be epistemic in nature, rather than
say, practical. Moreover for the quality of the reason to be of epistemic merit, it will need to be
reasonably strong in epistemic terms, given the circumstances—like that of an eyewitness account.

Rocky Webb
relevant information reasonably available at the time. In this way, it may be similar to an intellectual expertise constituting belief. The truth status of Janet’s belief has no impact on her epistemic credit because her reasons for the belief have not changed. Her reasons are just as good in both cases, and observation is typically taken to provide an excellent reason. At a foundational level, the entire scientific method presupposes the validity of observation as a truth detection tool.

If this line of thinking is right, then there may be a case for thinking of Janet in case (2) as having a belief which enjoys what I term weak epistemic success. I call it ‘weak’ because the belief in question is not true; however her belief has excellent grounds. Moreover, Janet’s belief is only false due to epistemic bad luck.

6.5) Judgement and Epistemic Credit

The term ‘judgement’ and its derivatives have at least two clear distinct meanings. Judgements can be abstract propositional beliefs. For example, one may come to a judgement about the nature of intellectual expertise and find that intellectual expertise does not presuppose knowledge. In this sense a judgement is the conclusion of an argument, or thought process. The second sense of judgement has us understand judgements either as intuitions or as something relevantly alike to intuitions. Such intuitions might be used when parking a car, or when driving in general. For instance, one utilises one’s judgement when gauging the speed of another vehicle. Adam Elga offers a useful distinction between information and judgement:
When it comes to the weather, I completely defer to the opinions of my local weather forecaster... I defer to her in two respects. First, I defer to her information: “As far as the weather goes,” I think to myself, “She’s got all the information that I have—and more.” Second, I defer to her judgement: I defer to the manner in which she forms opinions on the basis of her information.26

There is another way of thinking about this distinction, and it can be demonstrated through working out the answer to a simple sum inside a math exam. Of interest is what could go wrong when working out the answer to that sum. Imagine that the sum we’re after is 75+25=100. This is both the correct sum (it’s the one on the math paper), and the correct answer to the sum (valid and sound). The 75, 25 and the fact that they are to be added, is the information available. The computational outcome of 100 at the end is the correct outcome of a judgement regarding the addition of 75 and 25.

Imagine that person A has accurate information. A knows both that 25 and 75, and that these two numbers are to be added. A has perfect vision. However person A just so happens to have terrible judgement, and so in the addition of the information, person A concludes that the answer to the equation is 110. Likewise, we might think of another person, say person B, who has terrible information. As far as B is concerned, the sum in question consists of 50+72. The poor student forgot his glasses. However, B operates with exemplary judgement upon that information, concluding that the answer is 122.

Neither answer is correct. Person A gives an answer which is neither valid nor sound. Person B however provides an answer which is at least valid. When

marking the paper, we might think to ourselves that student A simply can’t add up that well, even when student A has accurate information. When it comes to student B though, we may be inclined to say that student B can’t copy down, but at least student B can add up. The difference in these cases is that the latter student is more cognitively capable or competent than the first, since at least if B is presented with the right information, B seems likely to get the right answer.\(^{27}\) Student A cannot even get the right answer even when given the correct information. In the same way that one answer is cognitively worrying, one is more cognitively creditworthy than the other.

Moreover, there are some situations in which a student may not deserve epistemic praise at all, even when providing a correct answer. For example, take students C and D. Both students C and D write down the correct answer of 100. However student C simply guessed at the answer. D asked another individual what the answer was. Neither student C nor D warrants the kind of epistemic credit that is of interest.\(^{28}\) Student B however does warrant some weak epistemic credit. Student B can do math. Student B has only provided the incorrect answer due to a bit of bad luck.

The kind of epistemic success exemplified by B lies in coming to a valid judgement. In this case it is constituted by something like competence or the cognitive capability to draw logical or rational results and inferences from relevant information. What the above example of the students shows, fits well with what

\(^{27}\) Of course one could not reasonably conclude that student B intellectually trumps student A on the basis of one sum alone, but the point here is simply illustrative.

\(^{28}\) Person D may warrant some epistemic credit on the view that person D deferred to the epistemic authority of another, and that it is of epistemic credit to know when to defer. In this case of this example, the epistemic merit of knowing when to defer is not of importance.
was said earlier about how to regard intellectual experts of the past. Aristotle, Darwin and Newton might not have had the correct information to hand. However what those individuals achieved in terms of epistemically rational thought is of epistemic merit irrespective of the truth of their beliefs or results. It is not a contentious claim to say that Newton, or Aristotle or Darwin had an intellectual motive which sufficiently respected the importance of truth and did what intellectually virtuous characters would have done in their circumstances. If something like this is correct, then such past figures do deserve epistemic credit, and warrant weak epistemic success. It would be wrong to simply to disenfranchise such past experts from any kind of epistemic success. Especially when we could simply say that by living when they did, they were subject to a little bit of epistemic bad luck.

6.6) Summary

In this chapter I have argued that intellectual experts need not be disenfranchised from epistemic success: in particular, weak epistemic success. My argument proceeded by noting that the traditional goal of inquiry is usually seen by philosophers as knowledge, or more recently as truth. However, given our epistemic facticity, I argued that truth can be a lofty goal; a goal which may rarely be achieved, or may in certain cases be unobtainable. By way of remedy I suggest that we may be interested in an account of epistemic success which does not require truth. I call this conception weak epistemic success. A weak conception of epistemic success allows us to reconcile three intuitions: The first concerns the
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number of intellectual experts that exist. The second is that intellectual experts are in fact epistemically successful entities. The third intuition concerned what epistemic success entails. I argued that we can understand epistemic success in a ‘weak’ way. A way which gets by without recourse to truth.

Moreover, shifting the traditional epistemological focus away from knowledge or truth onto weak epistemic success does away with problematic quixotic Cartesian epistemology. By focusing on weak epistemic success I present an achievable goal of inquiry. The goal of weak epistemic success does not automatically make past epistemic endeavours meaningless. Where truth and knowledge serve as the overarching goals of epistemic inquiry, and where success is a matter of fulfilling those goals, few may ever succeed.

Further I argue that epistemic credit or merit cannot depend upon truth. I used the example of Janet and the location of her mobile phone to make this point. Epistemic merit or credit depends, so I argued, on justified belief, where justified is understood as something like epistemically warranted, epistemically well-founded, epistemically virtuous belief or some such thing. Moreover, epistemic credit cannot depend upon luck. As such, epistemically justified belief serves as one of the two anchors for a conception of weak epistemic success.

The other anchor concerns valid judgement. Finally in the section on judgement I argue that both epistemic success and epistemic credit can be understood as a function of coming to valid judgements. Such judgments need not be sound to be epistemically creditworthy. As such, valid judgment can be used to anchor weak epistemic success.
Part 2: Positioning

A Theory of Intellectual Expertise

A Theory of Intellectual Expertise in Relevant Contemporary Debates
Preface to Part 2

In part 2 of my theory of intellectual expertise, I examine the impact my theory may have in some important debates. I do this for several reasons. The first reason is to test the explanatory power of the theory. I want to demonstrate what exactly my theory of intellectual expertise can help explain. An example of this approach is chapter 8. In chapter 8 I use my theory to explain the possibility moral expertise, albeit an intellectual variety of moral expertise.

Another reason for looking at the potential impact of my theory of intellectual expertise is to see what it can add to age-old debates. An example of such a debate is the debate concerning the epistemic prowess of democratic arrangements. I argued in chapter 4 that intellectual expertise was not necessarily esoteric. In chapter 7 I argue that a consequence of this view is that epistemic defences of governmental arrangements are largely misplaced. It seems clear that the epistemic prowess of any given government largely depends upon the epistemic facticity of the government in question. And this could be either remarkably prosperous or remarkably impoverished. As such, my theory of intellectual expertise seems to have something to add to debates in political philosophy.¹

¹ It is becoming more commonplace for political philosophers to be interested in the conclusions and arguments of epistemologists, and social epistemologists. For instance, Peter turns to some of Goldman’s work in social epistemology in her Democratic Legitimacy: Peter, F., (2011), Democratic Legitimacy, Routledge. Likewise, social epistemologists are informed by and have something to add to debates in political philosophy, for an example of which, see: Goldman, A., (1999), Knowledge in a Social World, Oxford University Press. It should come as no surprise that epistemologists, social or otherwise, have something to say about epistemic defences of democratic arrangements. Likewise, it should come as no surprise that political philosophers have something to say about epistemic defences of democratic arrangements.
A final reason for writing the second part of my theory of intellectual expertise is to offer some clarity on how it is we should respond to the existence of intellectual experts. Much progress has been made in recent years in understanding the relationship between practical authority and autonomy. However less has been said about the relationship between theoretical authority and autonomy. In fact there has been a notable absence of literature. In chapter 9, I offer some clarity on what moves I think my theory of intellectual expertise allows us to make in preserving autonomy.

As such, the second part of my theory of intellectual expertise is about positioning the thesis within the current literature, and about how it allows one to respond to some of the interesting debates going on within social epistemology and beyond.
Chapter 7: Experts and Democracy

In this chapter I turn to the relationship between experts and democracy. In particular, I focus on David Estlund’s recent work *Democratic Authority*. I outline Estlund’s position and methodology for crediting under idealised conditions a modest epistemic weight to democratic procedures. I argue that Estlund fails to secure the modest epistemic weight he seeks for democratic procedures due to his methodology. I outline several problems for Estlund’s approach.

The first problem concerns ‘deck-rigging’. As I explain in section 7.3, Estlund limits political inputs inside his ideal democratic procedure, epistemic proceduralism, to views which are ‘reasonable’. By reasonable, Estlund seems to have in mind any views which are politically liberal, broadly conceived. I argue in section 7.5 that a consequence of this move is that Estlund fails to defend the epistemic weight of democratic procedures. Instead what is defended is the epistemic value of politically liberal points of view.

This naturally leads into the second problem, which I call the ‘empty shell’ problem. The empty shell problem concerns the fact that if one limits the inputs of any particular procedure to a certain range of values, then the outcome can only, by necessity, result in one of that range of values. So where each of the inputs is politically liberal, regardless of the procedure the political outcome can only be politically liberal. This is a problem for Estlund because his argument does not so much defend democracy, but any government type that can only legitimately operate within fixed politically liberal parameters.
Again this naturally leads into a third problem, which I call the ‘epistemic merit’ problem. Where the inputs into the political system are limited to always prevent a truly disastrous outcome, or indeed, any non-politically liberal outcome, it is hard to see how epistemic merit pertains. Epistemic merit pertains when an obstacle is either overcome or avoided due to epistemic abilities or competencies.

In this case, due to the epistemic merits of democratic arrangements. However, by limiting the pool of political views to views which are, broadly speaking, politically liberal, it is not surprising that genocide or economic meltdown is unlikely to occur. However, neither is it epistemically creditworthy for democratic procedures. For merit to obtain, a democracy would have to prevent such political failures from occurring regardless of the political inputs into the procedure.

Lastly, I make some comments about how successful epistemic defences of government types can be. I argue that there are no compelling reasons to think that any particular governmental arrangement is likely to lead policies which enjoy the finest kind of epistemic success. I argue that the epistemic quality of a political outcome is primarily a matter of the epistemic quality of the decision maker(s). For example, an epistocracy of chimpanzees is unlikely to do well on an objective epistemic scale when compared to a democracy of humans.

7.1) Relevance

Traditionally philosophers have characterised the relationship between the epistemic authority of experts and democratic procedures as contentious.\(^1\) Estlund

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\(^1\) For more information about intellectual expertise and epistemic authority, see chapter 9.
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states that “[t]he idea of democracy is not naturally plausible. The stakes of political decisions are high, and the ancient analogy is apt: in life-and-death medical decisions, what could be stupider than holding a vote? Most people do not know enough to make a wise medical decision, but a few people do, and it seems clear that the decisions should be made by those who know best.” One of Estlund’s goals in his work *Democratic Authority* is to demonstrate that some democratic procedures are not *that* bad epistemically. If successful, Estlund will have pacified the ancient critique of democracy as uneducated mob-rule.

More importantly from our perspective are the debates and questions like those Estlund raises. They provide an opportunity to test my theory of intellectual expertise. They allow us to see what it can help explain, and to see how robust any explanation is. Debates concerning the epistemic prowess of government types, the relationship between democracy and expertise, moral expertise, and intellectual trust and authority are what the second part of my thesis deals with. Certain chapters will push harder specifically on my theory of intellectual expertise than others. By contrast, certain chapters such as this one will be more focused on very specific implications of my theory of intellectual expertise.

The particular implication I have in mind is my claim that intellectual expertise is not necessarily esoteric. In both the next section, 7.2, and also in far more extensively in 7.6, I highlight what I suspect are some consequences of this view for political philosophy. I argue that it is not clear that epistemic defences of government types are either interesting or all that helpful. I argue that whether or not a government does well, on objective, epistemic grounds, is primarily decided

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by the epistemic quality of the voting population. A democracy in which everyone is an expert is going to do better, epistemically, than an epistocracy of chimpanzees. ³ However, it is because of this particular implication, and the importance of the relationship between democracies, experts, and the arguments for and against both democracy and epistocracy, that I think this chapter warrants its place in my thesis.

7.2) Estlund’s Position

Lippert-Rasmussen characterises Estlund’s position as follows:

An influential anti-democratic argument says’: (1) Answers to political questions are truth-apt. (2) A small elite only—the epistocrats—know these truths. (3) If answers to political questions are truth-apt, then those with this knowledge about these matters should rule. (4) Thus, epistocrats should rule.’ Many democrats have responded by denying (1), arguing that, say, answers to political questions are sheer personal preference. Others have rejected (2), contending that knowledge of the true answers to political questions is evenly distributed. David Estlund finds neither of these replies conclusive. Instead, he attacks (3) arguing that there can be no agreement between qualified people as to who the epistocrats are and that people are not subject to being ruled by experts, whose status as such they can reasonably dispute.⁴

In answer to the anti-democratic argument, a strategy I adopt later is to question the thought that only a small elite can ever have access to or can ever properly utilise the relevant truths or epistemically rational beliefs in question. In

³ At least given the current features of our world.
chapter 4 I concluded that there is no necessary cap on the number of intellectual experts. That intellectual expertise is not necessarily esoteric. I argue that a consequence of this position is that debates concerning the epistemic prowess of government types are theoretically diminished. I make the case for this in section 7.6.

Turning back to Estlund, Estlund concludes that a democratic arrangement is “...the most efficient problem solving mechanism which meets a criterion based on respecting a particular value. Specifically, Estlund thinks that we should expect democracy to do well at coming up with political decisions which avoid what he calls “primary bads” (war, famine, economic or political collapse, epidemic and genocide), but that a condition on any justified political authority is that it is acceptable to those who are subject to that authority.”

This acceptability is the value which democracy, but not epistocracy meets. Estlund’s argument against epistocracy and for democracy rests on three key parts. The first is the acceptability to all qualified points of view of democratic arrangements. The second is the unacceptability of epistocratic arrangements to all qualified points of view. The third is the claim that democratic procedures enjoy sufficient epistemic weight; a weight which Estlund describes as both modest and better than random. For Estlund, a qualified point of view is understood as a view

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which fits within a framework of public reason, or is broadly speaking, politically liberal.  

7.3) Estlund’s Methodology

Estlund’s makes the argument for the modest weight of democratic arrangements across chapters 9 and 10 of his book *Democratic Authority*. I will focus on Estlund’s chapter 9, which pursues the first stages of that argument. For my purposes, only the beginning steps of that argument are relevant.

Estlund sets about conceiving of uncontroversial criteria from which to judge the epistemic merit of an ideal democratic arrangement. Estlund’s methodology is to point toward what ought to be avoided, and then claim that any government that reliably manages to navigate away from what ought to be avoided, enjoys some modest epistemic value. Estlund calls what are to be avoided primary bads. The primary bads must meet certain criteria if they are to be uncontroversial.

Estlund firstly states that the primary bads must be sufficiently weighty:

“The first important feature that these issues should have is that they are among the most important issues that are subject to political decision.”8 The second is criterion is that: “the list should include issues that exhibit enough variety so that we will have some reason to extrapolate from performance on this set to a great number of issues on the list.”9 The third criterion is tractability: “The list should be

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empirically and theoretically tractable. By this I mean that it should avoid unnecessary length, complexity, or empirical inscrutability."\textsuperscript{10} Lastly, the primary bads must count as objectionable within a framework of public reason. If a primary bad could be reasonably thought of as unobjectionable, then it could not serve its purpose as a bad. The primary bads consist of “war, famine, economic collapse, political collapse, epidemic, and genocide.”\textsuperscript{11} Failure to avoid any primary bad would constitute, claims Estlund, a severe epistemic failure. Estlund talks of avoiding primary bads rather than achieving primary goods in order to avoid controversial claims about what constitutes ‘the good’. Estlund claims that:

In some cases, we can know how someone will perform on some task because we know the content of the standard (e.g., the answer key), and know the person’s particular skills and abilities on those specific questions... In other cases, we can estimate someone’s likely performance even if we do not know the content of the standard of correctness. You do not need to know much at all about what questions will be on a biology test to know that, for example, a group of students cooperating will probably perform better than any of them would perform alone...

The right answers to the questions political communities face are often controversial. If we tried to support a political system’s epistemic value—its tendency to get the right answers—by starting with controversial assertions about what the right answers are, the whole account would inherit the controversy. It would be an advantage if we could make the epistemic case in less controversial

\textsuperscript{10} Estlund, D., (2008), Democratic Authority, Princeton University Press, 162.

\textsuperscript{11} Estlund, D., (2008), Democratic Authority, Princeton University Press, 163.
terms. This would require us to supply reasons for thinking a certain system tends to get the right answer, whatever those right answers might be. 12

Estlund equates the epistemic value of democratic decision making with its tendency to get the ‘right’ answers and avoid ‘wrong’ answers. However Estlund does not want to endorse a particular morally substantive conception of what constitutes ‘right’ or ‘good’:

Call a substantive epistemic account an account that, first, posits some conception of justice or common good and, second, claims that democratic procedures are likely to get things right according to that standard… By contrast, consider a formal epistemic account according to which a democratic process is held to have a tendency to get things right from the standpoint of justice or common good whatever the best conception of those might be. The formal epistemic approach makes no appeal to any specific conception of justice or common good and so would be untroubled by the fact that there is reasonable disagreement about which conception is best or correct. Such disagreement would not hamper the epistemic approach if it could be established beyond reasonable disagreement that whatever the best or correct conception of justice or common good is, certain democratic procedures have a certain tendency to produce outcomes conducive to justice or common good. 13

In the next section I will focus on Estlund’s qualified acceptability criterion, and what Estlund takes to constitute a ‘reasonable’ view.

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7.4) Qualified Acceptability

The qualified acceptability requirement is a key and central feature of Estlund’s overall project in *Democratic Authority*. Estlund states that:

Even if there are true standards of better and worse political decisions, there may also be a true general acceptability criterion that brackets the use of true standards. This would be a part of the nature of justified political authority. To state a rough version: no one has authority or legitimate coercive power over another without a justification that could be accepted by all qualified points of view. The idea of general acceptability can be construed to yield importantly different versions. One simple version requires that all actual subjects would accept the proposition in question. A more complex, and more influential, version holds that not just any ground of objection is, as it is usually put, “reasonable,” or as I will put the idea more generally, “qualified.” This version owes some account of which grounds of rejection are qualified and which are not, and an account of why.\(^{14}\)

Estlund links his acceptability requirement to the broader idea of reasonability when he speaks about political liberalism in chapter 3 of *Democratic Authority*. In particular, Estlund states that:

Political liberalism asserts bold principles of philosophical toleration in the realm of political justification. The moral and philosophical principles and doctrines are inadmissible unless they are acceptable to all reasonable citizens without

contradicting any of the wide range of reasonable moral and philosophical world views likely to persist in a just and open society.\textsuperscript{15}

This line of thought has the impact of limiting the primary bads to a list of bads that “…should be seen to be capable of serving its function from within the wide variety of reasonable or qualified points of view. So the question is not what are really and truly the most important issues. Some of the most important issues might well be left off, and that would not defeat the list’s purpose. The list needs to serve its purpose within public reason, and this limits what we may put on it.”\textsuperscript{16}

Consequently the qualified acceptability criterion has at least two important impacts. The first impact is that legitimate sway over political decisions is limited to people who primarily have views which are ‘reasonable’. Other things equal only their objections, when ‘reasonable’, can serve as legitimacy defeaters. This point is made implicitly by Estlund when he states that a “…necessary condition on the legitimate exercise of power... [is] that it be justifiable in terms acceptable to all qualified points of view (where “qualified” will be filled in by “reasonable” or some such thing).”\textsuperscript{17} While Estlund does not wish to comment on exactly which views are to count as reasonable, or qualified and disqualified, he does defend the position that some views are in fact to be disqualified.\textsuperscript{18} Estlund uses the example of racist and xenophobic views as a criticism of the ‘actual acceptance view’ which entails that any disagreement with government action, policy or law counts as a legitimacy

\textsuperscript{15} Estlund, D., (2008), Democratic Authority, Princeton University Press, 45.
\textsuperscript{16} Estlund, D., (2008), Democratic Authority, Princeton University Press, 162.
\textsuperscript{17} Estlund, D., (2008), Democratic Authority, Princeton University Press, 41.
\textsuperscript{18} Estlund claims that “…the qualified acceptability view does count some views as disqualified, even though it counts many views, including mistaken ones, as nevertheless qualified.” Estlund, D., (2008), Democratic Authority, Princeton University Press, 47.
defeater of that action, policy or law.\textsuperscript{19} As such, I take racist or xenophobic positions to be an example of views which are disqualified from legitimately partaking in the political process. Consequently such views cannot legitimately impact upon the political process. Further, it seems clear that Estlund’s view of what counts as reasonable is limited to views that can be aptly described as politically liberal, where the term ‘politically liberal’ is broadly conceived.

The second impact of Estlund’s qualified acceptability criterion is that it also limits what counts as a negative outcome to a political process. Estlund confirms this point when he states that:

As for weight, I assume without argument that the avoidance of each of these six things [primary bads] is highly important on any reasonable view of the ends of politics. Of course, many people will think these are not as important as certain other goods or bads.\textsuperscript{20}

Therefore Estlund’s argument is that democratic procedures enjoy both a modest epistemic weight, and an epistemic weight that is better than a random outcome to a procedure, when (1) legitimate impact upon the political process is limited to views which are ‘qualified’, and (2) where the outcomes to that political process are measured by criteria which are “...highly important on any reasonable view of the ends of politics.”\textsuperscript{21} Legitimate inputs into the procedure are limited to inputs which are qualified, and the epistemic quality of the outcome is measured by criteria which are important according to qualified views.

7.5) Problems for Estlund

What seems immediately clear is that unless the inputs into a democratic procedure are in fact limited to views which are ‘reasonable’, democracy appears to be epistemically indefensible. Indefensible that is, at least insofar as one measures epistemic performance in accordance with Estlund’s primary bads. Even the most cursory glance at history indicates this. Take for instance what Burch states with historical examples about the ignorance of the morally sincere, common man:

[T]here are genuinely intellectual failings which mislead even those ordinary men who are deeply committed to morality. The ordinary, everyday Nazi might slaughter people of a sincere conviction that he is doing what is morally right and not out of any self-seeking greed or nationalistic obsession. The Christian missionaries who burned infidel Caribbean Indians at the stake often did so in the interests of the immortal souls of the Indians themselves and not out of any personal pique of delectation for the spectacle of agony. Ordinary men, out of a sense of moral commitment to general human welfare, will often recommend enforced sterilization of, or enforced abortion for, certain classes, races, ethnic groups and nations. There are so many factors which can pervert the judgement of the unreflective man that it would be amazing indeed if his moral judgement were above all others the one to be trusted... [N]o one should think that naïve, untutored moral vision automatically deserves ribbons for its scope and clarity. Ignorance can shutter the moral eyes of a person, prejudice can veil them, custom can blinker them.  

In accordance with politically liberal criteria for epistemic success, it is clear that unless inputs into democratic procedures are limited to views which are politically liberal, democratic procedures will be epistemically indefensible. One need only imagine the horrors certain past societies may have democratically enforced if given the opportunity. Estlund more or less endorses this conclusion when he states the following:

Some verdicts, and some legal commands, must be too unjust or otherwise over the line beyond which legitimacy and / or authority falls away however proper the procedure for making the decision might have been. Of course, this could be denied. It is natural and important to try and out the hypothesis that these could always be explained in terms of failures of the procedure. Perhaps no really proper procedure would ever generate laws that should not be enforced or obeyed. I know of no argument that lends serious support to such a conjecture. Certainly, actual heinous laws can normally be shown to have been produced by defective procedures, but that may be only because actual procedures are always more or less defective. That would not show that if they had not been procedurally defective they also would not have gone substantively so terribly wrong. There seems to be no reason to believe that. In the end, democratic procedures, however procedurally pristine, will reflect the views of those who vote. And those views might be anything at all, as heinous or as noble as you please. We are forced to conclude that even a fine procedure, one that normally lends legitimacy and

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23 At least insofar as one is interested in judging whether or not the procedure ensures the finest kind of epistemic success, rather than say, weak epistemic success.

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authority to its decisions, can sometimes generate laws that lack the characteristic legitimacy and authority that the procedure normally provides.\textsuperscript{24}

In response to this problem, Estlund could venture that he is only interested in measuring the epistemic weight of democratic arrangements in politically liberal societies. As such, Estlund may argue that the fact that democratic arrangements are epistemically indefensible in non-politically liberal societies is irrelevant. Estlund would be claiming that he is not trying to defend the epistemic merits of democratic arrangements, in say for instance, Aztec society. What Estlund would be offering instead, is an argument which says democracy doesn’t do badly, epistemically, where the people able to participate are reasonable.

Were Estlund to offer such a claim, then his conclusion about democratic arrangements routinely avoiding the primary bads in politically liberal societies is unsurprising. It is not surprising, for instance, that genocide is avoided in a political process where everyone engaged in that process respects human rights. Where such limitations to political participation apply, it seems clear that the primary bads will be routinely avoided. It is not surprising that genocide is avoided in many modern western democracies, let alone for societies in the idealised circumstances described by Estlund.

However, at this stage several problems should be noted. The first problem is the ‘deck rigging’ problem which I outline just below in 7.5.1. The second problem is the ‘empty shell’ problem outlined in 7.5.2. The third problem is the ‘epistemic merit’ problem, which I outline in 7.5.3.

The first problem for Estlund is the deck rigging problem. It is unclear that Estlund has ventured an epistemic defence of democracy at all. When not limited to politically liberal inputs, democratic arrangements may not be likely to avoid the primary bads. Where a democracy operates without the safeguards of politically liberal inputs, it seems clear that the primary bads may occur far more regularly. As such, one might argue that it is not democratic arrangements which do the work of avoiding the primary bads, but the limitation of inputs into the democratic procedures. In this case, limits to politically liberal points of view. Any epistemic merit available here is only available due to the limitation of inputs to politically liberal points of view, and not as a consequence of democratic procedures. There is nothing about the typical procedures of democratic decision making that necessarily implies the avoidance of any particular primary bad. Estlund admits that ultimately the outcome of the procedure reflects the inputs. As such, Estlund appears to be rigging the deck. He actively limits his focus to democracies as they perform under certain idealised conditions. There is no reason to think, once non-politically liberal views are accounted for, that the avoidance of the primary bads is necessarily likely. As such, it is not so much democracy that gets an epistemic defence, but the idealised conditions.

However there is a response Estlund could make to this line of criticism. Estlund could claim that he has in fact defended democratic arrangements on epistemic grounds. Estlund might argue that he has shown that only in epistemically impoverished situations, like that of the Aztecs for instance, does a
democracy perform poorly. The idea here is that any epistemically poor outcome to a democratic procedure is not so much a product of democratic decision making, but a product of an epistemically impoverished society. However, I believe this rebuttal is countered by both the empty shell problem and the epistemic merit problem.

7.5.2) The Empty Shell Problem

One immediate concern we might follow up with is why such an argument is not available for any and every kind of government? If under idealised conditions democracy doesn’t do badly, and when it does do badly it is due to epistemic impoverishment or poor procedural arrangements, then why couldn’t an advocate of any other government type offer a similar epistemic defence? For instance, why couldn’t a monarchist claim that the epistemic failures of monarchies were not so much the fault of monarchies, as opposed to the epistemic circumstances of the time? If a monarch’s decision was bound by Estlund’s qualified acceptability criterion, it would not be clear that a primary bad was likely to occur.

Where inputs into a procedure are limited to reasonable points of view, political decisions do seem likely avoid the primary bads. But this seems true regardless of what the procedure or government type is: democracy, monarchy, epistocracy, oligarchy, despotism, etc.

The point is that what Estlund has offered in *Democratic Authority* is an epistemic defence of politically liberal values, measured through the use of politically liberal criteria. Estlund has not epistemically defended one particular
government type. Where the inputs are limited to politically liberal values, the primary bads do seem safely avoided. However, so long as (1) the outcome to procedure is bound to its inputs, and (2) the inputs are limited to politically liberal values, then (3) it does not seem to matter what kind of government decision making mechanism is in place. Regardless, the outcome is never non-politically liberal. This is what I call the empty shell problem: Estlund’s argument does not so much epistemically defend democratic decision making, as opposed to any form of decision making when bounded by politically liberal values. If a monarch’s policy options were limited to options that accorded with politically liberal values, then it is not clear the monarch in question could fail on Estlund’s list of primary bads.

7.5.3) The Epistemic Merit Problem

Moreover, we may be concerned about how much epistemic weight Estlund thinks democratic arrangements enjoy. What is clear from Estlund’s argument is that under idealised conditions, democratic decision making really is likely to avoid the primary bads. So too, under ideal conditions, is every form of government. However, what is unclear is that in such a situation, that any epistemic merit or credit obtains. One important feature of epistemic merit or credit is that it requires the option for failure. Take for instance what Foley says about blame and praise:

In cases where a proposition that he cannot believe is epistemically rational for him, he should not be blamed for not believing it; and in cases where he cannot
help but believe what is epistemically rational for him, he should not be praised for believing it.”

Likewise, we might hold, where one cannot conclude in favour of a non-politically liberal option, one should not be praised for concluding in favour of a politically liberal option. The point here is that Estlund’s idealised condition actually limits, if not outright negates any epistemic merit, credit, or praiseworthiness he seeks for democratic arrangements. Three examples help to make this point clear.

For the first example, imagine the Aztecs made their decisions democratically. Let us now imagine that democratic decision making in Aztec society leads to the abolition of human sacrifices to the gods. In such a situation and in accordance with Estlund’s politically liberal criteria, democracy would be owed epistemic credit. It is owed credit because despite many non-politically liberal inputs into the procedure, a non-politically liberal outcome was avoided. So due to democracy, a primary bad was avoided: avoided that is, when there really was a genuine chance of failure. Again had the inputs into the procedure been limited exclusively to politically liberal, or ‘qualified’ inputs, it is unclear that epistemic merit would obtain.

For the second example, consider when democratic decision making in modern day Britain does not lead to sacrificing people to the gods. It is not clear that democracy is somehow owed any epistemic credit as a consequence of this fact. There’s a good chance that in modern day Britain, far less extreme and far less

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non-politically liberal views are engaged in the political process. As such, any credit that is due to democratic arrangements is diminished.26

For the third example, imagine you were asked to go to the shops and get some ice-cream. You were asked to get either chocolate or vanilla flavoured ice-cream, but certainly not banana. Arriving at the shops, and looking about for ice-cream, you have completely forgotten that you were asked for either chocolate or vanilla flavoured ice-cream. You have also forgotten you were explicitly told to avoid banana flavoured ice-cream. However, it just so happens that the shop only has both vanilla and chocolate flavour in stock. In picking one of those two options, do you deserve any credit? The answer here is negative. You do not deserve credit. The fact that you avoided banana and chose one of the acceptable two options didn’t really have anything to do with you or any abilities you possess. Likewise, where a democracy is bounded by politically liberal inputs, it is not clear that it deserves epistemic credit for avoiding non-politically liberal outcomes: where the deck is rigged, there is no epistemic merit available.

7.6) Some Final Remarks

I would like to now make some final remarks about epistemic defences of governmental arrangements. The age old criticism of democratic arrangements is

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26 A further point we might be interested in making is that the amount of credit due or not due to an epistemic entity seems to largely depend upon the difficulty of the task at hand, and the degree of success attained. So for instance, achieving a pass grade at high-school is typically thought less epistemically prestigious than receiving a pass grade at university level. This is because, other things equal, one is typically thought more difficult than the other. Again, achieving a good pass, other things equal, is typically thought epistemically better than a mediocre pass. Consequently, it is not clear that the epistemic weight of democratic procedures, even when performing under ideal conditions, can aptly be described as modest. The amount of credit any particular epistemic entity is due seems to be largely contextual.

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that it does not let those that know best decide. If you are interested in having the
correct outcome to a decision, you go the experts, not the rabble. This point, at
least initially seems fair enough. Some, in light of the approach I have taken
throughout this thesis, might wish to question whether experts really do know best.
Others may be more interested in teasing out one of the possible implications from
my conclusion in chapter 4, that intellectual expertise is not necessarily esoteric.
What implication might that be?

A good way of bringing out that particular implication is through the use of a
thought experiment. If intellectual expertise is not necessarily esoteric, there
could, in principle, exist a society in which everyone is an intellectual expert on
everything that one could be an intellectual expert about. We might note that such
a society strikes us as remarkably unlikely to occur. However, this fact does not
preclude the possibility.

In such a society, what seems clear is that any decision made is likely to have
a robust justification. In particular, many decisions will have robust epistemic
justifications, not merely practical ones. What is unclear is that the government
type will have much impact upon the epistemic quality of any particular outcome.
What does this mean? It means that it is not clear, in such an epistemically ideal
society, that there is much epistemic difference between whether the decision is
made democratically or epistocratically. If everyone is an expert anyway, what
difference is there? In at least this one case, it seems clear that the criticism of
democracy as uneducated mob rule really depends upon the mob being
uneducated. Likewise, an epistocracy being the enlightened rule of the wise really
requires that the experts are in fact wise. If this point is not yet clear, consider an
epistocracy of chimpanzees versus a democracy of chimpanzees. It is not clear that
an epistocracy of chimpanzees will really perform better, on epistemic grounds,
than a democracy of chimpanzees.

The overall point here is this: how well any particular form of government
performs in terms of the amount of epistemic failures it avoids, or the amount of
epistemic successes it attains, seems to depend largely on both how well educated,
and how knowledgeable the general body politic is.\(^{27}\) It depends on the epistemic
facticity of the society in question. The experts from past societies may be unlikely
to make what we would describe as good decisions, in light of our more modern
methods, information and values. To re-quote Estlund, “…democratic procedures,
however procedurally pristine, will reflect the views of those who vote. And those
views might be anything at all, as heinous or as noble as you please.”\(^{28}\)

7.7) Summary

In this chapter I have outlined Estlund’s position and methodology for arguing that
democratic procedures, under certain idealised conditions, enjoy a modest
everstemic weight. Those idealised conditions include limiting inputs into democratic
arrangements to ‘qualified’ points of view. A qualified point of view seems to mean
a politically liberal or ‘reasonable’ point of view.

I offered three critiques of Estlund’s arguments: the first was that in limiting
inputs into democratic procedures Estlund doesn’t really epistemically defend
democracy. Without those limitations it seems clear that democratic arrangements

\(^{27}\) I have in mind here the finest kind of epistemic success, rather than weak epistemic success.

could perform poorly on epistemic grounds. The second criticism was that it is clear that any and every form of government could do well under ideal conditions. So again, it’s not really democratic decision making which is defended on epistemic grounds, as opposed to any and every form of government. The third criticism was that it is unclear that under such idealised conditions any real epistemic credit, merit or praiseworthiness really obtains. Insofar as such praiseworthiness is a function of working to avoid failure, limiting inputs to politically liberal points of view removes any effort required from democratic arrangements.

Lastly, I finished the chapter with some final remarks. I argued that governmental arrangements are held hostage to the epistemic facticity of any particular society. Insofar as the outcome to any political process is a function of the inputs into that process, it seems clear that any political procedure, or any government type, could end up producing as excellent or as poor a choice as is imaginable. Estlund accepts this. It really could be the case that a democracy ends up passing morally heinous laws. It really could be the case that a liberal democracy might make a terrible blunder in economic policy, leading to economic collapse.

I suspect it is a mistake to lay faults such as these solely at the hands of the government type, or the procedures in place for decision making. Instead, it may be better to take a look at the epistemic quality of the voting population, and acknowledge that the epistemic quality of any particular outcome is linked in no small way to the epistemic quality of the inputs. The epistemic quality of the inputs can be excellent, but they can also be dire.
Chapter 8: Moral Expertise

I will firstly outline a brief history of the very idea of moral expertise. In explaining why the possibility of moral expertise is a highly controversial issue, I comment on relationship between truth, epistemic authority, and democracy.

I will then challenge the view that moral expertise necessarily presupposes ethical objectivism. Traditionally it has been held that ethical expertise must presuppose the existence of moral truths. If all was flux, how could someone claim that P is what ought to be done? I argue that there are several possibilities to engage with here: one possibility concerns whether or not ethical objectivism has to be true or simply believed true in an appropriate kind of way. For instance, in a way which is epistemically rational.

A second and more favourable possibility is that intellectual moral expertise simply presupposes holding a sufficient number of ethical statements in an appropriate kind of way: a way which is constitutive of intellectual expertise. Of the two possibilities, I find this latter view less problematic. As such, I argue that intellectual moral expertise need not presuppose the truth of moral objectivism.

These considerations allow me to argue for the possibility of two separate domains of intellectual expertise. The first domain I argue for is intellectual moral expertise. The second I argue for is intellectual expertise about morality. These are two distinct, but often closely related domains of intellectual expertise.

Intellectual moral expertise concerns morality itself. For example, one may be an expert on whether or not P is morally permissible. This domain consists
primarily of normative moral questions and answers. By contrast, intellectual expertise about morality may not primarily concern normative ethics. Instead, intellectual expertise about morality may primarily concern meta-ethical issues. An example of such an issue could be on the philosophical merits of prescriptivism, or quasi-realism.

This distinction allows for a fresh rebuttal of both Kant’s and Ryle’s arguments against the possibility of intellectual expertise, and leads into an outline of how it is that a professional ethicist or moral philosopher can qualify, in principle, as a moral expert.

### 8.1) Ethical Expertise and Controversy

This section is broken down into four smaller subsections. In 8.1.1 I will firstly offer a brief outline of two glorifying, infamous characterisations of moral expertise. In 8.1.2 I will outline the alleged implications of the possibility of moral expertise. I will thirdly in 8.1.3 draw a parallel between some of the alleged implications from the possibility of moral expertise, and the role of truth in democratic politics. Finally, in 8.1.4, I offer some remarks about the relationship between epistemic authority and truth.

#### 8.1.1) Moral Expertise as Controversial

The very idea of moral expertise has a long and controversial history. Traditionally it has invited all sorts of questions and worries:
What status do the ethical judgements of moral philosophers have? What part do moral philosophers play in committees? Are their judgements superior to the moral judgements of other people? Are moral philosophers, who deal with ethical theory, *moral experts*, with privileged access to the truth? If not, why do we send them to ethics committees? If they are, do they play a special role in those committees? Are they more competent at moral judgements than the other participants?¹

For others, the idea of moral expertise is just plain silly:

It is silly, as well as presumptuous, for any one type of philosopher to pose as the champion of virtue. And it is also one reason why many people find moral philosophy an unsatisfactory subject. For they mistakenly look to the moral philosophers for guidance.²

One of the oldest and best well known examples of a moral expert is Plato’s philosopher King. Introduced in the *Republic*, the philosopher kings are leaders of the ideal state, appointed as such on the basis of their epistemic authority. In the case of political decision making, political or moral expertise counts as the appropriate kind of expertise. In the Platonic parlour, the expertise of the philosopher king consists in knowledge of the form of the Good.

All political decisions are made by the guardians without reference to the citizen body. The guardians, moreover, are neither elected nor removable from office by popular vote. Politically their power is absolute; the only control over them is itself ideological, in that they are under an absolute moral obligation not to allow any

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deviation from the system of education by which the ruling ideology, and therefore acceptance by all of the political system, is passed on from one generation to the next... The knowledge of the Good which is the most precious possession of that intellect determines the content of the ideology, which in turn provides justification for the power which that intellect exercises via its knowledge of how the Good is to be realised.  

Such a political system is alien to modern democratic politics and thinking. One basic thought that underlies the Platonic position is that some decisions are, on epistemic grounds, superior to others. Given that any society wants to make the best possible decisions, it may be best—or as Plato saw it, it is best—to defer to someone with the appropriate kind of expertise. As Estlund puts it “[t]he idea of democracy is not naturally plausible. The stakes of political decisions are high, and the ancient analogy is apt: in life-and-death medical decisions, what could be stupider than holding a vote? Most people do not know enough to make a wise medical decision, but a few people do, and it seems clear that the decisions should be made by those who know best.” Immediately, the position is anti-democratic and readily construed as totalitarian in nature. According to Jenks, this is exactly the position many scholars and philosophers are reconciled to:

It is disarmingly easy to form a picture of Plato as a frustrated tyrant, an embittered aristocrat who wishes to impose his will on the great unwashed herd of Athens. Plato is thus denounced by Popper as a totalitarian, while Taylor wonders whether

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he is better characterized as totalitarian, authoritarian or merely paternalistic.\(^6\)

Kraut seems to fear that the moral expert Plato occasionally speaks of is an autonomy-thief; Kraut consoles himself with the reflection that moral expertise is perhaps impossible.\(^7\) Woodruff understands Plato as endorsing the view that expertise is not only possible but realized in the person of Socrates.\(^8\) Vlastos and Williams try to rescue Plato from the charge that in his central book on politics, Republic, he shows concern for one class at the expense of others, by arguing that justice for an artisan lies in the recognition that he is an artisan, and that it is someone else’s job to rule.\(^9\)

For Caplan, calling “...ethicists ‘moral experts’ is a kind of revival for Plato’s philosopher-kings.”\(^10\) Likewise others draw the similar conclusions about Rousseau’s great legislator, who is to “...compel without violence and persuade without convincing.”\(^11\) While the great legislator is not to have political command over men or laws, his office is ‘superior’, as is his intelligence:

Discovering the rules of society best suited to nations would require a superior intelligence that beheld all passions of men without feeling any of them:

happiness was independent of us, yet who nevertheless was willing to concern itself with ours; finally, who in the passage of time, procures for himself a distant glory, being able to labor in one age and find enjoyment in another. Gods would be needed to give men laws...

The legislator is in every respect an extraordinary man in the state. If he ought to be so by his genius, he is no less so by his office, which is neither magistracy nor sovereignty. This office, which constitutes the republic, does not enter into its constitution. It is a particular and superior function having nothing in common with the dominion over men...

It is this sublime reason, which transcends the grasp of ordinary men, whose decisions the legislator puts in the mouth of the immortals in order to compel by divine authority those whom human prudence could not move. But not everybody is capable of making the gods speak or of being believed when he proclaims himself their interpreter. The great soul of the legislator is the true miracle that should prove his mission.12

According to Kelly, “Rousseau’s presentation reveals at least three parts to the legislator’s task. First, he must understand the principles of political right. Second, he must discover or invent institutions which embody these principles in a manner that suits the conditions of a particular society. Finally, he must gain the consent of his people to follow these institutions.”13 It is both the grandiose claims to elevated status, and recourse to anti-democratic conclusions that make the possibility of moral expertise such a controversial topic. As Jenks puts it:

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The idea that there is, or that there could be, a moral expert has struck some commentators as disturbing. Some commentators seem to fear any moral expert as they would a moral fascist, a sort of moral supervisor, who will bark out moral orders to us all and rob us of our precious autonomy. The moral expert, they think, would be a moral tyrant. Other commentators seem to console themselves with the reflection that the supportive context for moral expertise does not now exist and perhaps never will, and that, therefore, we must “rather bear those ills we know than fly to those we know not of,” as Hamlet would have it.\textsuperscript{14}

Burch also initially despairs about the repugnance of the moral expert, but after consideration looks toward a more charitable characterisation:

Still, one is apt to sense a certain repulsiveness in the idea of a moral expert \textit{tout court}. Probably the idea seems repulsive because when we begin to think of a moral expert, we imagine some sort of arrogant philosopher-king, a kind of Mustapha Mond and Grand Inquisitor rolled into one. This sort of moral idol has familiar feet of clay. But, in trying to gain an image of the moral expert \textit{tout court}, perhaps we should rather think of figures like Confucius’s “superior man,” Christianity’s “saint,” or philosophy’s “wise man.” Then, perhaps, the idea of a moral expert would not appear as the repugnant notion of a haughty moral usurper, but rather as an idea which ordinary men striving to live a morally better life keep dimly before their minds as the moral ideal.\textsuperscript{15}

However we wish to characterise the moral expert, there are legitimate questions concerning the epistemic authority of moral experts and democratic decision making.

8.1.2) Despotic Moral Experts and Despotic Moral Truths

A similar situation of contention and controversy plagues truth claims in democratic politics. Estlund notes that:

Hannah Arendt observes that “from the viewpoint of politics, truth has a despotic character.”\(^{16}\) Some speak of truth, or appeals to truth, as apolitical, or antipolitical, or evasions of the political, but they seem really to mean that these lean toward a despotic kind of politics. Their language exhibits a certain commitment about what it would take to make politics morally superior to despotism. The anxiety about truth is that it is thought to foreclose dispute, disagreement, and deliberation (three different things). Arendt worries that truth “precludes debate, and debate constitutes the very essence of political life.”\(^{17}\) If politics ought to be essentially a realm of contestation, then it must not recognize anything as true beyond contestation. The point of this view is not mainly that certain avenues of contestation must be socially open or even legally protected. It is the deeper claim that for the purpose of political discourse truth is not an appropriate category, since politics must not begin with conclusions.\(^{18}\)

Further, “Arendt contends, “philosophic truths,” including ethical propositions about justice or human equality, have no legitimate place in politics as truths. That would “violat[e] the rules of the political realm” in which such matters depend “on free agreement and consent...discursive, representative

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thinking...persuasion and discussion.”¹⁹ Deep normative truths could only rule as despots—that is, illegitimately.”²⁰

Both truth and moral expertise are said to be despotic in character. If such conclusions are true, it seems that both truth and moral expertise deny political and/or moral freedom. The moral expert, by instructing you in matters of what you ought to do, epistemically trumps your autonomy. For this reason, moral expertise is often given short shrift in philosophy. Supporters of democracy, or more generally political freedom, see themselves as having a reason to steer clear of accepting the possibility of moral expertise.

8.1.3) Moral Experts and Political Authorities

It is interesting to consider whether intellectual moral expertise necessarily provides the intellectual expert with legitimate political authority. For instance, one could deny that epistemic authority automatically entails political authority, where appropriate, by citing something along the lines of Estlund’s ‘expert/boss fallacy’. This entails “...inferring illicitly from “S would rule better” to “S is a legitimate or authoritative ruler.” To the person who knows better, the other might hope to say, “you might be right, but who made you boss?”²¹ The idea here is that epistemic authority does not readily translate into legitimate political authority or authority at all, if such epistemic authority can be reasonably disputed. Estlund’s argument is that legitimate political authority entails consent of the reasonable.

An alternative strategy, also focused on the nature of authority, is to question whether beliefs which are constitutive of intellectual expertise, but not true, are epistemically authoritative. If beliefs which are constitutive of intellectual expertise are not necessarily epistemically authoritative, questions concerning whether epistemic authority translates into political authority, let alone *legitimate* political authority, may be sidestepped.

On my account the intellectual expert qualifies as an intellectual expert on the basis of possessing a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. The intellectual expert is not an intellectual expert on the basis of the truth of his or her views. For some, this may seem to diminish the epistemic and therefore political authority that intellectual moral experts necessarily possess. Some may think, for instance, that the mere fact that a belief is constitutive of intellectual expertise does not make it constitutive of epistemic, and consequently, political authority. One might hold that for epistemic authority, and consequently political authority, truth is required.

For anyone who might hold this view, or a relevantly similar view, this position could serve as welcome relief. This is because on such a view, political autonomy would not necessarily conflict with the existence of moral expertise. After all, while intellectual moral experts may hold many intellectual expertise constituting beliefs, they may not hold many true beliefs. And thereby, on this view, many epistemically authoritative beliefs.

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22 I should remind the reader that my theory of intellectual expertise is not exhaustive. This is to say I outline some necessary conditions of qualification for intellectual expertise. I do not maintain that I have outlined sufficient criteria.
There may therefore, be an alternative path for those who (1) do think that epistemic authority grants political/moral authority, (2) do believe that truth poses a problem for democratic thinking, (3) do want to endorse the possibility of moral expertise while, (4) remaining committed to democratic politics. What renders this view consistent is the thought that intellectual expertise does not necessarily entail epistemic authority. Why? Because intellectual expertise does not necessarily entail true beliefs, and a prerequisite of political authority based on epistemic authority is truth. Consequently on this view, intellectual moral experts do not necessarily challenge democratic decision making.

However, this is a position I cannot endorse. On the basis of positions I have already outlined, I find myself understanding epistemic authority as a matter of the possession of a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs, once again bypassing truth. Those reasons I mention could involve not accepting that epistemic authority is held hostage to knowledge or truth. They could also include the view that epistemic success can be understood as a function of epistemic justification, and not truth exclusively. The view here is that epistemic authority is a function of epistemic justification, not truth.

Insofar as the positions I have taken throughout this thesis have allowed me to build a robust theory of intellectual expertise, these positions may also indicate a path we could use to explain what constitutes epistemic authority. I will not venture into the territory concerning what constitutes epistemic authority. This requires a separate essay. Yet, I will say the following: if epistemic authority is not

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23 By origin, I mean that which grounds, causes or is responsible for the existence of epistemic authority.

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necessarily a function of truth, but can be explained in terms of epistemic justification, then concerns about the relationship between intellectual expertise, epistemic authority and democratic politics will remain. Intellectual moral expertise is possible without the possession of any truths whatsoever. In my view, this does not necessarily diminish the epistemic authority of moral experts, even if their views are incorrect.

The topic of the final chapter concerns mitigating the epistemic authority challenge presented by the existence of intellectual experts. In chapter 9, I focus on questions concerning the relationship between intellectual expertise and intellectual trust in others. I argue that it is not altogether clear that deference to the views of intellectual experts is always appropriate, even when one has primarily epistemic goals. For now however, I shall turn back to moral expertise.

8.2) Intellectual Expertise and Objectivity in Ethics

In this section I will firstly outline why on traditional thinking moral expertise has been thought to presuppose the truth of moral objectivism. I to argue that intellectual expertise can exist without either the possession of or existence of any moral truths. Lastly I take issue with a Singer’s understanding of the nature of moral expertise.

8.2.1) Epistemic Rationality and Moral Objectivism

Traditionally moral expertise has been thought to presuppose the existence of moral truths. This is for two reasons. The first reason is that expertise presupposes
knowledge. This entails three further positions: (1) that moral truths exist, (2) that at least certain moral truths are knowable, and (3) that expertise entails the possession of such moral truths. Additionally, if you think knowledge entails justified true belief, then a further implication is that moral expertise presupposes the possibility of epistemically justified beliefs about any given moral proposition.

The second reason is that moral ‘ought’ claims are typically thought to be unintelligible without the existence of moral truths. If there is no fact of the matter, in what sense is one action (or inaction) the correct action (or inaction)?

In exploring this issue, it may be best to clarify what an objective’ nature of morality entails. Likewise it may be best to clarify what a ‘non-objective’ or ‘subjective’ nature of morality entails. On what it means for morality to be subjective or objective in nature, McConnell claims that:

Intuitively, we may say that a matter is objective if there are correct and incorrect answers to the questions arising about it. To put it more precisely and with regard to the specific matter, we may say that questions in ethics are objective if and only if those questions are such that whenever two people disagree about a moral judgement, at least one is mistaken. A matter is subjective if questions concerning it do not admit of correct and incorrect answers. Ethics is a subjective matter if and only if it is possible for two people to disagree about a moral judgement and neither is mistaken. It is often said that if a matter is objective, then answers to questions about it are independent of what those investigating the matter believe.
By contrast, if an area is subjective, issues in that field are just matters of opinion; there is no independent check on a person’s views.\(^{24}\)

McConnell then continues on to note that:

It seems plausible to maintain that there cannot be experts concerning a matter unless it is objective. Objectivity, it seems, is a necessary condition for the possibility of experts. Peter Singer *seems* to endorse this claim for ethics. As he puts it, ‘Obviously, if anyone’s moral views are as good as anyone else’s, there can be no moral experts.’\(^{25}\)

In chapter 2, I noted that the traditional account of intellectual expertise presupposed the truth of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. For reasons I outlined back in chapter 2, I argued that any sensible account of intellectual expertise must not presuppose the truth of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. In chapter 3 I argued that intellectual expertise constituting beliefs can be understood as epistemically justified beliefs.\(^{26}\)

As such, we may be able to understand, or accommodate for the possibility of intellectual moral expertise without the existence of any moral truths. On such an account, intellectual moral expertise would not presuppose knowledge of either normative moral truths or meta-ethical truths. Further, because intellectual moral expertise would not presuppose the possession of truths, the non-existence of such truths would not directly impact on the possibility of intellectual moral expertise.


\(^{26}\) By epistemically justified beliefs, I mean to include all of those prior conditions I outlined back in chapter 3, and any additional criteria outlined since, such as that outlined in chapter 4.
A Theory of Intellectual Expertise

At this point one might ask the following: how can one have epistemically rational beliefs within the domain of ethics, about the truth or falsity of ethical propositions, when there are no ethical truths? Surely it cannot be rational to believe something *really* is wrong, when there is no truth of the matter?

There are two responses I wish to make to this question. I reject the first response in 8.2.2 in favour of the second response found in 8.2.3.

**8.2.2) The First Response: Objectivism and Epistemic Rationality**

It can be epistemically rational to believe something really is right or wrong—to believe certain moral propositions are objectively true—provided that you have accessed the relevant information sufficient to epistemically warrant such a belief. Even if moral objectivism is in fact not true, it may be epistemically rational to believe that moral objectivism is true. The information indicating the falsity of moral objectivism could be obscure, and the case in favour of moral objectivism could be compelling given your current information. On this view, all that is required for the possibility of intellectual moral expertise is an intellectual expertise constituting belief in the truth of moral objectivism. The truth or falsity of moral objectivism is consequently irrelevant.

I presented my account of intellectual expertise to explain how mistaken beliefs can be constitutive of intellectual expertise. My theory of intellectual expertise achieves this, and as such, there is no concern about a mistaken belief in moral objectivism. Intellectual moral expertise is not defeated by mistaken beliefs.
This includes mistaken beliefs that certain P’s are always morally right or wrong due to a universal moral law. So long as any such belief is constitutive of intellectual expertise, intellectual moral experts can be mistaken about ethical matters and not necessarily end up disenfranchised from their status as intellectual experts.

This response works, I think, insofar as one is prepared to make the rather demanding and substantive claim that intellectual moral expertise must presuppose an endorsement of moral objectivism. However there is a less substantive, less controversial position one could take, which still allows for intellectual moral expertise, but without a commitment to moral objectivism. If this route is available, it is to be preferred.

8.2.3) The Second Response: Ethical Propositions

The first response commits intellectual moral experts to having an intellectual expertise constituting belief in moral objectivism. Without such a belief, one could not qualify as an intellectual moral expert. If I were to endorse this view, I would be claiming that one cannot be an intellectual moral expert without an intellectual expertise constituting belief in moral objectivism. However, I do not want to endorse this view.

My criticism of the first response is that it is comparatively overbearing. Comparatively overbearing that is, to a requirement that allows one to qualify as an intellectual moral expert without specifying that a necessary feature of such

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27 It is not clear on such a requirement that quasi-realists, for instance, could qualify as intellectual moral experts. For more information about quasi-realism, see: Blackburn, S., (1993), Essays in Quasi Realism, Oxford University Press.
qualification is that one be committed to moral objectivism. If such path is available I think we should take it. The first reason for this is that it will be less controversial. The second reason is that it will offer increased flexibility when considering the possibility of intellectual moral expertise.

However, not specifying that intellectual moral expertise presupposes an epistemically rational belief in moral objectivism does not mean that an epistemically rational belief in moral objectivism is not in fact a necessary pre-requisite for one to qualify as an intellectual moral expert. It may or may not be the case that it is impossible to have an epistemically rational belief in the truth of a certain moral proposition without an acceptance of moral objectivism. However, by not specifying that intellectual moral expertise necessarily presupposes an epistemically rational belief in moral objectivism, I leave aside the question of whether or not one can simultaneously endorse, in a way which is epistemically rational, that a certain moral proposition is true and that moral objectivism is not true, while working within a correspondence theory of truth framework. Such a question is for moral philosophers such as Blackburn to decide.\textsuperscript{28}

As such, the second response will simply be that any moral statement which is said to count toward the moral expertise of the intellectual moral expert must be held in a way which is constitutive of intellectual expertise.\textsuperscript{29} This latter requirement is less controversial because it is formal, rather than substantive. It does not specify whether or not one must be committed to moral objectivism. It leaves open the issue of whether or not one can simultaneously, epistemically

\textsuperscript{28} For example, see, Blackburn, S., (1993), Essays in Quasi Realism, Oxford University Press.

\textsuperscript{29} I will not comment on whether or not this is achievable without an epistemically rational belief in moral objectivism.

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rationally, endorse moral non-objectivism and the thesis that moral propositions have either a truth value or normative force. It leaves such questions open for the appropriate experts: intellectual moral experts, and intellectual experts about morality. As such, the second response in 8.2.3 is the response I endorse. I do not endorse the first response from 8.2.2.

8.3) Intellectual Expertise about Morality

However this may still leave a large number of moral philosophers disenfranchised from intellectual expertise. For instance, thinkers who can aptly be described as moral non-objectivists, or hold that moral utterances do not have normative force or value. Such philosophers may believe that they are unable to hold that certain ethical statements are true or false in a way which is epistemically justified. Some question whether or not the category of truth applies at all.

We have to be careful not to disenfranchise anyone who is unable to hold ethical statements as either true or false in a way which is constitutive of intellectual expertise. In other words, we have to be careful not to disenfranchise someone from intellectual expertise simply on the basis of their meta-ethical beliefs.\(^\text{30}\)

A way of solving this problem is to distinguish between two domains of intellectual expertise. The first domain would be intellectual moral expertise. The intellectual moral expert is an expert on normative moral issues. The second

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\(^{30}\) There are some conditions under which someone may not qualify as an intellectual expert due to their meta-ethical beliefs: Namely if those beliefs are not constitutive of intellectual expertise. I have in mind, the conditions I outlined in chapter 3.
domain would be intellectual expertise about morality. The intellectual expert about morality is an expert on meta-ethical issues. Which category any particular philosopher or ethicist falls into depends, in part, upon their meta-ethical beliefs. An example will help to clarify this.

Imagine we have two professors, who both teach moral philosophy. Professor A is an objectivist. Professor B is a non-objectivist. Professor A would seem to qualify, other things equal as an intellectual moral expert. Professor A should have accessed most of the relevant information reasonably available, and have epistemically rational beliefs about the normative value of certain moral propositions. Such beliefs are constitutive of intellectual expertise within the domain of morality, or moral philosophy, and as such professor A, having a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs, qualifies as an intellectual moral expert.

However, let us say that professor B endorses the view that moral utterances have no normative force, and that the category of truth does not apply to moral utterances. I call professor B an intellectual expert about morality. This is because his views about morality, moral statements and meta-ethical issues will be, other things equal, constitutive of intellectual expertise.

The distinction between the two different kinds of intellectual experts turns on the meta-ethical beliefs of the intellectual expert in question. However there is likely to be much in the way of overlap between the domains. It may be worth remembering that professional ethicists and moral philosophers do not simply have beliefs about the rightness or wrongness of any particular action. Normally, they have an understanding of theoretical ethics as well. For example, ethicists and
moral philosophers are usually able to offer recourse to the distinction between

deontological and consequentialist theories of morality. They understand, again

classically, where moral issues arise in political discourse, in business, war,
sex, cloning, the environment and a whole host of other issues. They understand
the strengths and weaknesses of virtue ethics, and the role that religious doctrines
have often played in lending force to arguments.

Another issue concerns where, if anywhere, these two domains come apart.
For instance, it is unclear that intellectual moral expertise necessarily starts and
ends with objective truths or epistemically rational beliefs about rightness and
wrongness of certain actions (or inactions). That is to say that the domain of ethics
consists in more than just knowing right from wrong.\textsuperscript{31} As Gesang puts it, “...moral
expertise is not independent of theoretical ethics.”\textsuperscript{32}

Likewise intellectual expertise about morality may be a domain which is
wider than just meta-ethics. For instance, there may be all different kinds of
accounts of morality, and the workings of morality. Sociologists and scientists may
wish to offer different kinds of different accounts about the nature of morality. So
while there may be much in the way of overlap, there will also be places where
these two distinct domains can come apart.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Knowledge is used in a pre-philosophical sense.
\textsuperscript{33} This is true for many domains, for instance, organic, inorganic and physical chemistry. As I explain
in the introduction to my thesis, a more controversial example might be that of epistemology and
social epistemology.
8.4) Against Ethical Expertise

In this section I will outline and criticise three arguments against either the existence of or possibility of moral expertise. The first is concerned with the lack of examples of moral experts. This argument is put forward by Socrates in the Protagoras. The second argument comes from Kant: it concerns the idea that one’s own unsophisticated thinking is the finest moral guide. The third argument is from both Ryle and Kant: Burch conjoins the argument from Ryle and Kant into the following, “...that having moral virtue is having certain cares and concerns, or certain wants, preferences, sentiments, and attitudes.” As such, it is not the kind of thing one can have expertise in.

8.4.1) Socrates

Burch outlines the position Plato takes in the Protagoras as follows:

Socrates... objects to the claim that there are moral experts on the grounds that no one has any reputation as such an expert. If anyone were renowned as exert in morality, then concerned parents would send children to him to be taught morality, and concerned governments would consult him on matters of political and moral importance. But, in fact, parents do not send children to special moral tutors, and governments consult no one in particular on moral matters. This Socratic argument, however, can only establish that there are no moral experts who are publicly esteemed.  

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Kraut takes the Socratic position to be one of serious doubt: “He [Socrates] has serious doubts about whether it is humanly possible to acquire the level of moral knowledge that would be needed to rule a city well. Socrates does not consider himself to be a moral expert, nor is he aware of any others who are.”

However as Burch noted, the mere absence of an obvious existence does not guarantee the non-existence of moral experts.

Moreover, we might note two further points: the first point is that the clergy are often sought out for moral guidance in times of hardship. Offering moral guidance is not uncharacteristic of the role of the clergy. This is true even if members of differing faiths might reasonably dispute the expert status of another faiths clergy. For instance, person A might recognise a rabbi as a moral guide and not a priest. Conversely, person B might recognise a priest as a moral guide, and not a rabbi.

The second point is that Socrates searched for moral expertise through the use of the elenchus. However, a search for moral knowledge is a search beyond requirements because my theory of intellectual expertise is simply after epistemically justified beliefs, and not moral knowledge. However, this is not to say that the elenctic method was an inappropriate or an ineffective tool in the search for moral expertise. Only that moral knowledge is not a pre-requisite of intellectual moral expertise.

8.4.2) Kant

Moving on to the second argument, Burch states that in “...the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims that the naïve, unsophisticated moral thinking of the ordinary man is the surest moral guide. It is more nearly apt to hit the bull’s-eye than the subtlest ethical calculations of the most astute moral philosopher, whose moral mind is likely to be corrupted by all sorts of irrelevant considerations. It follows that no one has any special moral expertise.”37

Many other authors make similar points, for example Gert states that “...morality does not require beliefs that are not known to all moral agents.”38 Again, but this time from Rescher: “Anything that requires extensive knowledge or deep cogitation is ipso facto ruled out as a moral precept or principle. The very idea of moral expertise...is for this reason totally unrealistic”.39

However arguments of this kind are flawed. Intellectual moral expertise is neither necessarily esoteric nor limited to moral knowledge. The exact reasoning used in the arguments above is something like this:

1) Moral knowledge (or information) is necessarily non-esoteric (possessed by all).

2) Something cannot simultaneously be esoteric and non-esoteric.

3) Expertise is necessarily esoteric.

4) Therefore moral expertise is impossible.

As I have outlined in chapter 4, intellectual expertise is not necessarily esoteric. As such, my theory of intellectual expertise cannot accept the third premise. Neither can my theory accept the conclusion that moral expertise is impossible. Moreover, intellectual moral expertise is not clearly limited to knowledge (or beliefs constitutive of intellectual expertise) of matters of right and wrong. Moral expertise, as a domain, can reasonably include theoretical ethics.

However, Kant’s view seems to be that in many cases critically reflecting on moral matters is unhelpful in guiding moral action. This may or may not be true. It is not clear to me that I need to defend either the view that it is true or false. 40 To quote Kant directly:

Yet we cannot consider without admiration how great an advantage the practical faculty of appraising has over the theoretical in common human understanding. In the latter, if the common reason ventures to depart from the laws of experience and perceptions of the senses it falls into sheer incomprehensibilities and self-contradictions, at least into a chaos of uncertainty, obscurity, and instability. But in practical matters, it is just when common understanding excludes all sensible incentives from practical laws that its faculty of appraising first begins to show itself to advantage. It then becomes even subtle, whether in quibbling tricks with its own conscience or with other claims regarding what is to be called right, or insincerely wanting to determine the worth of actions for its own instruction; and,

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40 As I have argued throughout the thesis, and as I discuss in more detail in the final chapter, there is neither a necessary link between intellectual expertise and truth, nor intellectual expertise and increased verisimilitude.
what is most admirable, in the latter case it can even has as good a hope of hitting the mark as any philosopher can promise himself...  

Others express a similar sentiment regarding how useless moral philosophy is as a moral guide to action: “It is no part of the professional business of moral philosophers to tell people what they ought or ought not to do. Moral philosophers, as such, have no special information, not available to the general public, about what is right and what is wrong.” The issue here concerns whether or not moral experts should be turned to for ethical advice. I deal with issues of intellectual trust in the concluding chapter, and so save my response for then. For now however, I suspect Burch’s response is one with which many will sympathise:

The trouble with this Kantian view is that it is little more than wishful thinking. It would be charming to rely on the moral judgement of the ordinary, morally concerned person; but if we did, how terribly often we would go astray. We would certainly go wrong in many difficult situations, in which the moral, factual and even metaphysical issues are very complicated... [T]here are genuinely intellectual failings which mislead even those ordinary men who are deeply committed to morality. The ordinary, everyday Nazi might slaughter people of a sincere conviction that he is doing what is morally right and not out of any self-seeking greed or nationalistic obsession. The Christian missionaries who burned infidels Caribbean Indians at the stake often did so in the interests of the immortal souls of the Indians themselves and not out of any personal pique of delection for the spectacle of agony. Ordinary men, out of a sense of moral commitment to general

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human welfare, will often recommend enforced sterilization of, or enforced abortion for, certain classes, races, ethnic groups and nations. There are so many factors which can pervert the judgement of the unreflective man that it would be amazing indeed if his moral judgement were above all others the one to be trusted... [N]o one should think that naïve, untutored moral vision automatically deserves ribbons for its scope and clarity. Ignorance can shutter the moral eyes of a person, prejudice can veil them, custom can blinker them.  

Likewise, Gert contends that: “Moral Philosophers clarify the nature of morality and try to show that it is justified, but those who have better knowledge of the relevant facts and more experience in the relevant field are more likely to make better moral decisions in that field.”

As such, it is not clear that the case for moral intellectual expertise can be defeated by concerns about the essentially esoteric nature of intellectual expertise and the essentially non-esoteric nature of moral knowledge. Intellectual expertise is not necessarily an esoteric matter, and intellectual moral expertise is not limited to moral knowledge. It can include knowledge about theoretical ethics. Likewise, it is not clear that the case for moral intellectual expertise can be defeated by the view that any particular moral expert cannot serve the function of being a sure moral guide. As I argue in the final chapter, often intellectual experts are not sure guides. For instance, this has often been true in the case of climate science and weather forecasting. It is not clear why intellectual moral experts should by necessity be different.

According to Singer, Ryle’s position is as follows:

“A more plausible argument against the possibility of moral expertise is to be found in Ryle’s essay ‘On Forgetting the Difference Between Right and Wrong’... Ryle’s point is that knowing the difference between right and wrong involves caring about it, so that it is not, in fact, really a case of knowing. One can only cease to care about it. Therefore, according to Ryle, the honest man is not ‘even a bit of an expert at anything.’”45

According to Burch, the Kantian position is as follows:

“Uprightness is not less available to the weak than to the strong; charity is no more remote from the slower-minded person than it is from the clever one; honesty is no more firmly barred from the nonphilosopher than it is the philosophic genius. It seems to follow from this that moral virtue is not a matter of skill, technique, knack or competence of any sort. And if it is not, then no one can become an expert in it. In the Foundations Kant argues for this position from his axiom that morality is a matter of the good will. He equates the good will with what he calls “respect for the moral law.”46

This thought is in part captured from the first line of the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Kant states that “It is impossible to think of anything at all

in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will.⁴⁷

The similarity between the Kantian and Rylean position lies in denying that morality is of a nature that allows for expertise: it is not a matter of accepting or not accepting propositions, or statements. When Ryle responds to the question of whether or not he knows the difference between right and wrong by claiming that while he did once, he has since forgotten it, he means to point to an absurdity. While one can quite straightforwardly forget a complex mathematical equation and its solution, it is not so clear that one can forget whether or not abortion is morally permissible.

I think the response on this point, to both Kant and Ryle, has to be partial acceptance. We are unlikely to forget whether or not abortion is morally permissible. However what we may forget is the exact workings of the theories which are for or against abortion.

For example, one may forget the criteria of Bentham’s hedonic calculus. Likewise, one may forget the finer points of Aristotle’s virtue ethics. Being a moral expert is going to require more than simply having a belief about the moral permissibility of, say for example, abortion in certain circumstances. It may involve an appreciation of exactly where, and what kinds of considerations or principles are invoked in deciding that moral permissibility. That is to say that intellectual moral expertise requires more than ‘knowing right from wrong’. Intellectual expertise is

focused on the reason for why something is the case. McConnell expresses a similar view in what follows:

Since the content of the rules defended by philosophers does not seem to differ significantly from the rules held by most other people, the expertise of philosophers must lie elsewhere. A plausible suggestion is that moral philosophers hold their views in a different way than most other people. It might be said that moral philosophers have knowledge of the rules and principles they hold, while most people have merely (presumably correct) beliefs concerning these precepts. What does this suggestion amount to? It means that philosophers can justify their beliefs in ways that ordinary men and women cannot. If pressed, they can provide a rationale to support the rules and principles they hold. When encountering novel situations to which these rules and principles must be applied, they will be able to handle the cases with greater ease. When dealing with sophists and skeptics, moral philosophers are less likely to become confused or to abandon their rules and principles. The idea here is a simple one. Being able to defend or justify one’s belief is usually said to be a necessary condition for having knowledge. Ordinary people can say something in defense of their moral beliefs; they cannot do as well as moral philosophers, however. And philosophers are sometimes able, through questioning, to get others to see what general moral principles underlie their particular beliefs.48

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8.5) Moral Philosophers as Intellectual Experts

According to my theory, intellectual expertise consists in possessing a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. These beliefs will pertain to a particular domain. An intellectual expertise constituting belief is a belief which is epistemically rational given most of the relevant information reasonably available. The beliefs in question are account giving beliefs, which is to say that they seek to explain either causally or teleologically. Additionally, those beliefs must be non-trivial, and at least some will need to advance a positive doctrine.

Intellectual moral expertise will involve all of the above: intellectual moral expertise will be constituted by a sufficient quantity of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs that pertain to the domain of morality and ethics. Those beliefs are to be epistemically rational given most of the relevant information reasonably available. The beliefs in question will be account giving beliefs, which is to say they explain on either a causal or teleological basis why something is right or wrong. These beliefs in particular are to be non-trivial, and at least some will need to advance a positive doctrine.\(^{49}\)

One particularly interesting feature of intellectual moral expertise, as mentioned earlier, may turn primarily on one’s meta-ethical beliefs. Where one’s beliefs are such that one believes the category of truth does not apply to ethical statements, one may instead qualify as an intellectual expert about morality.

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\(^{49}\)As I mention in chapter 4, by positive doctrine I mean beliefs concerning either what is true, or what one is epistemically justified to believe, rather than simply beliefs about what is not the case, or what one is not epistemically justified in believing.
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Just like with any other kind of intellectual expert, intellectual moral experts and experts about morality will not always be correct. In fact, the advice provided by such experts may often be incorrect, when measured from some sort of ‘God’s eye’ point of view. Moreover, this may go some way to quelling the worry that intellectual moral expertise entails that the intellectual moral expert is himself a paragon of virtue. An example of such a worry is highlighted by McConnell when he states that: “There is disagreement among philosophers about the concept of moral expertise. Some say that a person is not a moral expert unless he is an expert at living a morally good life. On this account a moral expert is, among other things, a model of virtue.”\(^5^0\) There are however, as always, those that disagree:

These persons [moral experts] will, however, have either greater knowledge than most others of the general principles which agents should follow, or a greater ability than most others to help agents formulate and understand plausible beliefs about how they ought to act. How these people will behave, though, is another matter. There need be no necessary connection between knowing what is right and doing what is right. This conception of expertise is not atypical; it has parallels in other areas. Top-notch political scientists are not always adept politicians. Similarly, some of the best coaches and analysts in the various sports were mediocre performers. And there is no doubt that there are some who have expert legal knowledge but do not always obey the law faithfully.\(^5^1\)

In the case of intellectual expertise, the answer on whether or not intellectual moral experts are necessarily virtuous is negative. For example, if

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being virtuous entails doing what is objectively right and never (or rarely) what is objectively wrong then there seems to be a good chance that intellectual moral expertise does not necessarily require or ensure that one is morally virtuous.

Furthermore, even if virtue were to require nothing more than good intentions, it is not clear why intellectual moral expertise should be singled out as the source of such intentions. Intellectual moral expertise or intellectual expertise about morality do may do little to dissuade a Machiavellian character.

8.6) Summary

In this chapter I have used my theory of intellectual expertise to help explain the possibility of intellectual moral expertise, and intellectual experts about morality.

I started in 8.1 by reviewing why the topic of moral expertise is a controversial issue. Some seem to think a moral expert invokes the idea of Plato’s philosopher king, or Rousseau’s unelected great legislator. Just like truth in democratic politics, some wonder whether or not there is a legitimate place for the moral expert in modern thinking.

In 8.2 I argued that intellectual moral expertise does not presuppose the truth of moral objectivism. Instead, I suggested that intellectual moral experts only need to be able to believe ethical statements in a way which is constitutive of intellectual expertise. I left open the question concerning whether such a possibility must presuppose an epistemically rational belief in moral objectivism. That is for moral philosophers to decide.
In 8.3 I outlined what I called intellectual expertise about morality. In this section I suggested that moral philosophers that do not believe the category of truth applies to ethical statements may qualify as intellectual experts about morality. I noted that in many cases, one’s meta-ethical beliefs will impact upon whether one qualifies as an intellectual moral expert or as an intellectual expert about morality.

In 8.4 I reviewed some of the historical and more famous arguments against the possibility of moral expertise. I concluded that so long as theoretical ethics is not thought to be an area about which there is no intellectual moral expertise, then these arguments are inconclusive.

Lastly in 8.5, I applied the conditions of my theory of intellectual expertise to demonstrate what is in principle required of an intellectual moral expert or intellectual expert about morality.\footnote{It is worth noting again that my theory of intellectual expertise that outlines some necessary conditions of intellectual expertise. I do not claim the conditions I outline in this thesis are either exhaustive, or sufficient for intellectual expertise qualification.}
Chapter 9: Epistemic Authority and Intellectual Trust

In the previous chapter I briefly mention epistemic authority. I outlined my view that the possession of epistemic authority can be explained by the possession of intellectual expertise constituting beliefs. I also stated that on this view one may have epistemic authority without truth. On this view epistemic authority is not held hostage to the possession of truths. So as I see it, intellectual experts may possess epistemic authority without the possession of any truths.

As I explained in chapter 8, some people may take issue with this view. However in this chapter I will focus on a specific concern: the relationship between intellectual expertise and intellectual trust in intellectual experts.

In addressing this concern I will have the following questions in mind: should we place epistemic trust in the opinions of intellectual experts? If we want to know the truth about something, can we reliably defer to the opinions of intellectual experts? Is sheer deference to intellectual experts the epistemically correct move? What if all we wanted was to have something like an epistemically robust opinion on a certain topic?

In this chapter I will start by outlining the relevance of issues concerning intellectual trust and intellectual expertise. I will continue secondly to offer a brief account of the recent history of the tension between authority and autonomy. The topic of epistemic authority has been largely ignored in the domain of epistemology until very recently. Any modern history of the topic will have to borrow from
outside the confines of epistemology. As such, the brief recent history I offer will include both politically focused and epistemologically focused discourse.

I will thirdly outline some of the most recent emerging positions on epistemic authority, including those from both Foley’s *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*, and Zagzebski’s *Epistemic Authority*. The positions here concern epistemic egoism, epistemic egotism, and epistemic universalism. I will fourthly repeat why my theory of intellectual expertise was created: it was created to revise our understanding of intellectual expertise, so that we could accommodate for the vast errors past intellectual experts have made; and at least from a historical perspective, the mistakes that experts may be making now.

Lastly, I will outline what I mean by adopting an approach of healthy scepticism, and why I believe it is appropriate to adopt healthy scepticism when deferring, or indeed not deferring to intellectual experts.

9.1) Relevance

At the start of my thesis I stated that that our culture is saturated in expertise. I said that every day we are bombarded with expert opinions and positions, many of which seem to contradict each other. Modern governance in the information age is a highly technical matter. The issue of intellectual trust in epistemic authorities is consequently paramount. Especially so for at least two reasons: the first of which is that laypeople typically defer to people they regard as experts, intellectual or otherwise, in forming many of their opinions about the world. This ranges from geo-political situations, international incidents, economics, and climate science to
the causes of cancer. The second reason is that we appear to have an autonomy challenge to deal with: if intellectual moral experts do exist, we need a way of dealing with the epistemic authority challenge that any such intellectual expert may pose. This latter issue is what I shall focus on in this chapter.

9.2) Authority and Autonomy: The Political Domain

First published in 1970, Wolff’s *In Defense of Anarchism* sets a challenge. Wolff’s challenge highlighted a major problem for political and legal philosophers. It concerns whether or not any political authority is ever legitimate, even when democratically elected. Wolff clarifies what he understands by authority in the following:

When I am commanded to do something, I may choose to comply even though I am not being threatened, because I am brought to believe that it is something which I ought to do. If that is the case, then I am not, strictly speaking, obeying a command, but rather acknowledging the force of an argument or the rightness of a prescription. The person who issues the “command” functions merely as the occasion for my becoming aware of my duty, and his role might in the other instances be filled by an admonishing friend, or even by my own conscience. I might, by an extension of the term, say that the prescription has authority over me, meaning simply that I ought to act in accordance with it. But the person himself has no authority—or, to be more precise, my complying with his command does not constitute an acknowledgement on my part of any such authority. Thus authority resides in persons; they possess it—if indeed they do at all—by virtue of who they are and not by virtue of what they command. My duty to obey is a duty.
owed to them, not to the moral law or to the beneficiaries of the actions I may be commanded to perform.¹

So as Wolff sees it, someone possesses authority when they are deferred to because of who they are, or some status that they have, rather than because the person deferring agrees or concurs with what is commanded. Green summarises Wolff’s argument as follows:

Following Kant, he [Wolff] argued that people enjoy dignity because they are endowed with reason and free will. They are thus in fact responsible for their choices, and their primary moral obligation is to take responsibility for them; they have a duty to be autonomous. This requires not merely choosing as one thinks best on balance but also using all available information in making up one’s mind about what to do. It is therefore the primary moral duty of each to form his own judgement on moral matters. But as Wolff properly observes, to recognize the authority of another is to surrender one’s own judgement to his… To refrain from theft because one sincerely believes it to be morally wrong is not to obey the law, but one’s own conscience. Only when the fact that an action is legally required, prohibited, or permitted itself counts in one’s practical reasoning does the law makes its authority felt. But this seems to lead immediately to a dilemma, for moral autonomy requires that each form his own judgement in moral matters and act on it, while authority requires the surrender of that judgement…²

As Wolff himself puts it, “[o]bedience is not a matter of doing what someone tells you to do. It is a matter of doing what he tells you to do because he

tells you to do it.”³ Later, Wolf continues to say that: “If the individual retains his autonomy by reserving to himself in each instance the final decision whether to cooperate, he thereby denies the authority of the state; if, on the other hand, he submits to the state and accepts its claim to authority, then so far as any of the above arguments indicate, he loses his autonomy.”⁴

Many diverse political philosophers have dedicated resources to dealing with this problem. For instance, Raz offers an instrumentalist account of authority which he calls the normal justification thesis. The normal justification thesis is the claim that:

...the normal way to establish that a person has authority over another person involves showing that the alleged subject is likely better to comply with reasons which apply to him (other than the alleged authoritative directives) if he accepts the directives of the alleged authority as authoritatively binding and tries to follow them, rather than by trying to follow the reasons which apply to him directly.⁵

The normal justification thesis deals with the moral demand of autonomy by making it clear that in many cases, all things considered, one may better act as a moral agent by following the commands of an authority. For instance, it may be unclear to you which reasons apply to you in many given circumstances, but clear to an authority which reasons do apply to you across those circumstances. As such, the authority may be better placed to judge. Christiano expresses this position as follows:

An instrumentalist attempts to meet Wolff’s challenge by saying that an authority is legitimate when one complies better with one’s duty overall by submission to authority than by trying to act on the basis of one’s own assessments of what is right and wrong in each instance.\(^6\)

9.2.1) Authority and Autonomy: The Epistemic Domain

Wolff outlines the problems he identifies as political problems. And indeed, the debate has often focused on the relationship between practical authority and autonomy. Rarely has the problem been tackled in terms of the relationship between theoretical authorities and the autonomy of laypersons. As I discussed in chapter 8, the authority of certain experts, for example moral experts, is not something philosophers are keen to discuss. However, Raz sometimes comments both in passing and directly on theoretical authorities. The term ‘theoretical authority’ is typically used as a byword for expert. As such, there is some crossover from the discussion of practical authority into theoretical authority. For instance, Raz states that “[o]ne may say that to be an authority on a certain matter is to be an authority about what to believe rather than about what to do.”\(^7\) This comment seems to apply straightforwardly to both political and theoretical authorities. By contrast, in a different text, Raz directly states that “[t]heoretical authorities are experts whose knowledge and understanding of the matter on which they are authorities is both exceptionally extensive and remarkably systematic and secure, making them reliable guides on those matters. Their word is a reason for holding


certain beliefs and discarding others." However such comments in the literature are notably sparse. Wolff for instance, mentions epistemic authority, although only claims in passing:

> There are many forms and degrees of forfeiture of autonomy. A man can give up his independence of judgement with regard to a single question, or in respect of a single type of question. For example, when I place myself in the hands of my doctor, I commit myself to whatever course of treatment he prescribes, but only in regard to my health. I do not make him my legal counselor as well... From the example of the doctor, it is obvious that there are at least some situations in which it is reasonable to give up one’s autonomy. Indeed, we may wonder whether, in a complex world of technical expertise, it is ever reasonable not to do so!

This statement highlights why the questions I asked in the introduction to this chapter are so pertinent: should we place epistemic trust in the opinions of intellectual experts? If we want to know the truth about something, can we reliably defer to the opinions of intellectual experts? Is sheer deference to intellectual experts the epistemically correct move? What if all we wanted was to have something like an epistemically robust opinion on a certain topic? Wolff wonders if it is ever reasonable not to defer.

Other things equal, if I have the epistemic goal of now believing that which is true, and not believing that which is false, am I, as a layperson, bound on pain of irrationality or unreasonableness to defer to the current expert consensus? My

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8 Raz, J., (2009), Between Authority and Interpretation, Oxford University Press, 154.
answer to this question is yes. One is bound on pain of irrationality or unreasonableness to defer in this circumstance, so long as other things are equal.

However, I will note in sections 9.3 and 9.4 that given our current epistemic facticity other things are not equal. I suspect that in many cases it is sheer hubris to believe that intellectual experts have primarily true beliefs, rather than simply epistemically justified beliefs. Additionally, it is epistemically rational to believe that intellectual experts have a less than an exemplary record at ascertaining truths. But this is getting ahead of ourselves. I return to these points in sections 9.3 and 9.4.

9.3) Egoism, Egotism, Universalism

Before I defend non-blind deference to intellectual experts, it will be worth noting three important emerging positions within the literature: epistemic egoism, epistemic egotism and epistemic universalism. These positions concern the base epistemic authority of others. By ‘base’ epistemic authority, I mean the authority which is due to another unknown person, before one has any beliefs about that other person’s epistemic status in any particular domain. In other words, the issue here concerns the intellectual trust one should place in an entity one regards as intellectually similar to oneself.\(^\text{10}\) By intellectually similar to oneself, I mean similar in terms of the faculties of reason the other possess, and/or any ability of the other to gather accurate information from their immediate environment.

\(^\text{10}\) Or if you prefer, an entity that you are absent reason to think is significantly epistemically different to oneself.
A preliminary and important note concerning the presentation of these positions should be made. I will be outlining both Foley’s and Zagzebski’s positions on these issues. These will include the fact that while Foley distinguishes between epistemic egotism and epistemic egoism, Zagzebski places both under the category of epistemic egoism. What will be clear in the descriptions from both Foley and Zagzebski is that where one sits on whether a position counts as epistemic egoism or epistemic egotism, is a matter of degree. The degree concerns how much intellectual trust one is prepared to place in others. As such, the distinction between epistemic egotism and epistemic egoism may be described as largely a matter of degree. It is an issue of how much trust it is appropriate to place in an unknown, but believed intellectually similar, epistemic entity.

**9.3.1) Egoism and Egotism**

Zagzebski states that epistemic self-reliance is a form of epistemic egoism.

According to Zagzebski, epistemic egoism is the view that one only has a reason to believe a certain proposition when one’s own faculties are utilised in evaluating the evidence for and against the proposition:

The most extreme form of epistemic self-reliance is one in which someone refuses to take the fact that someone else has a given belief as a reason to believe it herself. Let us call this position *extreme epistemic egoism*. According to the extreme egoist, I have reason to believe \( p \) only when the direct exercise of my faculties gives me reasons for \( p \). The fact that another person has a belief \( p \) gives me no reason to
believe it. The beliefs of others are irrelevant to my reasons for having a belief because their beliefs are the outcomes of the exercise of their faculties.\textsuperscript{11}

While Zagzebski labels this view extreme epistemic egoism, Foley refers to this kind of position as epistemic egotism:

Epistemic egotists maintain that it is never reasonable to grant authority to the opinions of others. The only legitimate way for someone else to affect my opinions is through Socratic influence. If you are able to instruct me about a topic so that I come to understand what you understand, I can reasonably believe what you believe; but according to egotists, it is never reasonable for me to borrow opinions from you, that is, to believe what you believe on the basis of your authority.\textsuperscript{12}

However Foley contrasts epistemic egotism with epistemic egoism. As I stated before, the difference here concerns matters of degree. According to Foley, epistemic egoists are less hard-line about whether or not it is ever reasonable to defer:

By contrast, epistemic egoists maintain that it sometimes can be reasonable for me to grant authority to others, but only if I have special information about them that gives me reasons to think that they are reliable with respect to the claim in question. The most straightforward way for me to have such reasons is by being acquainted with their track record. If by my lights their past record on the issue is a good one, I have reasons, all else being equal, to count their current opinions as credible. For example, if you tell me that P is true and I am familiar with your long

\textsuperscript{11} Zagzebski, L., T., (2012), \textit{Epistemic Authority}, Oxford University Press, 52.
\textsuperscript{12} Foley, R., (2001), \textit{Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others}, Cambridge University Press, 86.
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history of reliability with respect to issues of this sort and I do not yet have my own opinion about P, I should be inclined to take your word about P.\textsuperscript{13}

So in other words, an egoist will maintain that when one believes any particular other to be epistemically reliable, one will have a reason, other things equal, to give weight to that person’s currently held, respective positions. This part about respective positions is important. In so far as I believe my doctor has accurately diagnosed past prior illnesses in me, or in people relevantly like me, according to the epistemic egoist I am epistemically justified in accepting his medical opinions further.

However, there are two important caveats to mention: the first caveat is that such opinions cannot strike us as outrageous. Imagine for instance that my doctor diagnosed me as pregnant when I am a man. I would not be epistemically justified given my other current beliefs about what pregnancy involves, and how deeply they run, in deferring to this doctor’s medical opinion. Any past epistemic respect I had for the doctor in question would also, chances are, be diminished.

The second caveat is that some may advise caution in accepting a doctor’s opinion should the diagnosed illness be one among a plethora of illnesses with very similar symptoms. To clarify the point, one should be cautious in accepting the doctor’s opinion as the final word when one already believes, in a way which is either fundamental or epistemically rational, that the illness in question is hard to initially accurately detect.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Foley, R., (2001), Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others, Cambridge University Press, 86.

\textsuperscript{14} Hard to detect that is without some technical diagnosis: I have in mind here something like a blood test or scan of some sort.

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Foley outlines a similar position when he speaks about the depth of confidence one has in one’s beliefs. About depth, Foley states that:

Some [opinions] are the product of such careful thinking that they are unlikely to be affected by further deliberation. Others are acquired with little thought but are nonetheless deeply held. For example, most perceptual beliefs are not the products of deliberation. We acquire them automatically, and yet many are such that reflection would not prompt us to revise them. They are reflectively stable, in the sense that we would continue to endorse them on reflection.15

This leads Foley to endorse the kind of view I outline with the medical diagnosis example above:

Like confidence, depth is a matter of degree, varying inversely with how vulnerable the opinion is to criticism on reflection. Some opinions are such that even superficial reflection would be enough to undermine one’s trust in them. Others are such that only lengthy or difficult reflection would undermine them. Still others are such that one would continue to endorse them even if one were to be ideally reflective.

So, to repeat, not every opinion is equally appropriate to trust and equally suitable for deliberating about what else to believe. The rough rule is that the more confidently and deeply held an opinion is, the more invulnerable to self-criticism it is and, hence, the more one is entitled to rely on it, at least until some new consideration or evidence arises that interferes with its credibility.16

Turning back to egoism and its supposed inevitability, according to Foley:

...it is important to resist the view that some version or another of epistemic egoism is inevitable, because we have no choice but to make up our own minds about who is reliable; no one can do this for us. It might then seem a manageably small step to the conclusion that whenever we rely on the opinions of others, we are in effect granting, or refusing to grant, specialized authority to them. The conclusion, in other words, is that once we probe deeply enough, all instances of authority can be seen as instances of specialized authority.

Suppose I rely upon your opinion about some issue. Then, according to this way of thinking, I must have decided that you are more reliable than I, or if I had no prior opinion about this issue, I have at least decided that you are not unreliable. In either case, I am responsible for granting you authority. The notion that one cannot escape responsibility for one’s life and conduct is a familiar preoccupation of both existentialists and management experts, the former with their talking of our being condemned to be free and the latter with their aphorism, “one can delegate authority but not responsibility.” The claim here is analogous, namely, granting intellectual authority to others cannot excuse me from responsibility for my own opinions, because it is I who bestow authority, if only by omission.\(^{17}\)

It is in fact this kind of thinking which makes Wolff’s argument so potent. Remember, Wolff states the following: “[i]f the individual retains his autonomy by reserving to himself in each instance the final decision whether to cooperate, he thereby denies the authority of the state”.\(^{18}\) Although every epistemic decision I make is ultimately a decision I make, it is often the case that these decisions are


automatic and trivial in nature. It is both obvious and trivial to state that there is a sense in which I am responsible for everything I do.

The triviality of this line of thought is what renders it largely uninteresting. It is the more interesting cases of epistemic deference which drive the debate, and not the trivial practicalities of everyday life.

9.3.2) Universalism

By contrast to epistemic egoists and epistemic egotists, epistemic universalists maintain that “[t]he fact that another person has a certain belief always gives me a prima facie reason to believe it.”¹⁹ Zagzebski continues to say that:

This is a weak form of epistemic universalism. It means that the fact that another person has a belief $p$ is a mark in favor of $p$... I want to stress that this point is not about trust in testimony. It is about the reasonable response to conscientiously believing that other persons are relevantly like myself, that they have whatever property I have that I trust in myself, and that the outputs of their faculties are relevantly like the outputs of my faculties.²⁰

Zagzebski further states that “[w]hen I say a prima facie reason, I do not mean an apparent reason. I mean one that has genuine weight, although it can be defeated or outweighed by other reasons. Having a prima facie reason to believe $p$ is not a decisive reason to believe $p$. Nonetheless, it is a genuine reason.”²¹ We may be interested to note that epistemic universalists do not need to deny that

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past intellectual reliability provides additional reason(s), or if you prefer, increased weight to an existing reason(s), to defer to currently the held opinions of those that have proved themselves epistemically reliable. Foley states that:

Universalists regard the opinions of other people as prima facie credible. They universally grant authority to others, even those about whom they know little or nothing. Both egoists and egotists refuse to grant universal authority. The former are willing to grant specialized authority. According to egotists, it is never reasonable to believe something on the authority of another person and, hence, the only appropriate way for others to affect one’s opinions is through Socratic influence. More exactly, this is so for the most extreme egotists. For convenience, I have been talking as if epistemic egoism, epistemic egotism, and epistemic universalism are sharply distinct positions, but for most purposes the differences among them are better viewed as being matters of degree.  

Foley adopts the position of epistemic universalism. For Foley, epistemic universalism is an essential ingredient of some of the positions he takes in his *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*. Such positions include the view that intellectual trust in others is a pre-requisite for trust in ourselves, and that typically one’s cognitive apparatus is socially influenced. I accept these views, though it is not clear to me that any position I defend in my thesis requires their truth.  

Foley’s position is that:

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24 Or for that matter their epistemic rationality, epistemic basicality, or that such beliefs are fundamental.
...insofar as it is rational for me to believe that someone else believes P, I automatically have at least a weak reason to believe P myself. I do not need to know anything special about the person. In particular, I do not need to know anything special about the person’s talents or training or track record with respect to the kind of issues in question, as egoists suggest. All else being equal, it is incoherent for me not to trust the other person, given that I trust myself. 25

I will hold that when I have a justified belief that an entity relevantly similar to me, expert or not, believes a certain proposition P, I am provided with a prima facie reason to at least consider what it is that they believe true. For instance, imagine that I am looking for a friend who stands out among a crowd due to a flamboyant item of clothing they are wearing. Perhaps they are wearing a fancy hat or something of this sort. Should a stranger say to me he saw my friend with the fancy hat ‘just over there’, and (1) I am justified in my belief that the stranger really did see my friend over there, then (2) I have a prima facie reason to believe the stranger. To put this schematically: if it is rational for me to accept that Q accepts P, I have a weak reason to accept P. Foley argues for epistemic universalism with in the following statement:

Given that it is reasonable for me to think that my opinions have been thoroughly influenced by others and that my intellectual faculties and my intellectual environment have broad commonalities with theirs, I risk inconsistency if I have intellectual trust in myself and do not have intellectual trust in others. The prima

facie intellectual trust I have in myself pressures me to also have prima facie intellectual trust in others. Trust in myself radiates outwards toward others.\(^{26}\)

In addition to my adoption of epistemic universalism, I will adopt the thesis that past reliability provides additional weight to current opinion. I assume this thesis is largely uncontroversial. As such I will not offer argument for it. As a corollary, I will assume that general past unreliability should decrease one’s trust toward current opinion. Imagine for instance that the weather forecast was only correct 20% of the time: one would be wise not to immediately endorse the forecast. Again I take this point to be largely uncontroversial, and so will not argue for it here.

9.4) A History of Error

When we measure past expert’s epistemic success in terms of the quantity of ascertained non-trivial truths, historically speaking it is clear that concluding negatively is reasonable. This fact has motivated my thesis, and my turn to subjective foundationalism. It is reasonable to believe that some intellectual experts in some domains may have been more objectively epistemically successful than others, where epistemic success is measured in terms of the quantity of ascertained non-trivial truths. It is also reasonable to believe that intellectual experts in certain domains may have simply done comparatively well, even if not objectively well in terms of the quantity of ascertained non-trivial truths.

Considerations such as these lead me outline a weaker kind of epistemic success in chapter 6, a kind that gets by without recourse to truth.

However, even in light of a weaker kind of epistemic success, there are excellent reasons to regard past epistemic endeavours as having failed in their goal of truth attainment. Oddie states that:

*Realism* holds that the constitutive aim of inquiry is the truth of some matter. *Optimism* holds that the history of inquiry is one of progress with respect to its constitutive aim. But *fallibilism* holds that, typically, our theories are false or very likely to be false, and when shown to be false they are replaced by other false theories.\(^{27}\)

Latter, Oddie states that: “We are all fallibilists now, but we are not all skeptics, or antirealists or nihilists. Most of us think inquiries can and do progress even when they fall short of their goal of locating the truth of the matter. We think that an inquiry can progress by moving from one falsehood to another falsehood, or from one imperfect credal state to another.”\(^{28}\)

Throughout my theory of intellectual expertise I take a binary approach to truth. I say that a propositional belief is either true or not true, and I do not consider concepts like verisimilitude. However some philosophers take comfort in concepts such as truthlikeness or verisimilitude. Those philosophers may wonder why my theory of intellectual expertise was not built around such concepts: couldn’t intellectual expertise have simply involved moving closer to the truth? Or couldn’t intellectual expertise be a matter of

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improving certain theories in terms of their truthlikeness? Wouldn’t this have been able to deal with the kinds of historical situations I described in chapter 2?

I suspect that when it comes to grounding my theory of intellectual expertise, or justifying the epistemological respect typically given in the west to scientific enterprises, verisimilitude is only of little (if any) help whatsoever. Imagine for instance that in answering a mathematical equation two answers are given, such that one answer is millions away from being correct, and another, billions away from being correct. On a scale of verisimilitude, the answer which is only millions away is more truth-like than the answer which is billions away. After all, one is much closer to the truth than the other. Yet this does not change the fact that the answer which is millions away is still millions away; it’s closer without being close. The fact of the matter is that both answers are incorrect, and that neither answer is even remotely close to being correct or true.

Moreover, we cannot know that the science of today is even remotely close to the truth without knowing for certain what that truth is. If we are ever going to know at all how close to a truth we are now, we will need to know what that truth is: in the same way that judging how far it is from point X to point Y requires us knowing where both point X and Y are, judging verisimilitude already requires having the correct answer. Additionally, for all we know, certain domains could be moving in the wrong direction.

How does all this bear on the current discussion? Inductively, we have excellent grounds for inferring that our current intellectual experts are simply incorrect about a great number of things, across a great number of domains. To repeat, and extend a previous quote from Foley:
Consider again skeptical challenges of the scientific method. The history of science, it is sometimes argued, is largely a history of error. We look back at the theories of even the best scientists of previous times and find much in those theories that is false, and even silly. But there is no reason to think that future scientists won’t think the same of our best current theories. In this way, the history of science seems to give us good inductive grounds—grounds that are themselves acceptable, given the methods of science—for thinking that the scientific method is unreliable.

This is a perfectly respectable skeptical strategy. If the scientific method can be shown, in accordance with canons acceptable to that method, to have generated mistaken theories with regularity, then so much the worse for it as a procedure to generate true theories. The least we should expect from a proposed method of inquiry is that it be able to fend off the charge that it undermines itself.

Much of recent philosophy of science can be read as trying to do just that. It tries to provide an interpretation of the scientific method and a reading of the history of science that together constitute a response to this pessimistic induction. Thus, there are those who say that any fair look at the history of science reveals not a history of repudiation of past theories but rather a history in which past theories are largely incorporated into their successor theories. In addition, they say that the immediate aim of scientific theorizing is not to generate theories that are strictly and thoroughly true but rather theories that are at least approximately true. The aim is verisimilitude. They then argue that the history of science, so understood, provides no basis for an introduction whose conclusion is that present theories are not even approximately true. On the contrary, the history is marked by ever-increasing predictive success, and the best explanation of this, they say, is that our sciences are getting closer and closer to the truth. So, far from supporting
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a pessimistic induction, the history of science gives us good empirical reasons to think that the terms of our sciences, especially our more mature ones, typically do refer. Thus, not only is the scientific method not self-refuting, it is self-authenticating.  

I suspect these facts, or if you prefer, this perspective, is all that is needed to reasonably advocate an agenda of healthy scepticism.

9.5) Healthy Scepticism

In *Epistemic Authority* Zagzebski deals with the issue of moral authority. According to Zagzebski, moral authority is a species of theoretical authority. Zagzebski claims that “[n]o domain of epistemic authority is more sensitive than the domain of the moral. People who accept scientific inquiry without question frequently balk at the idea that they ought to accept authority in any of their moral beliefs.”

Zagzebski’s position is worth mentioning here because in the last chapter I advocated the existence of intellectual moral experts. Utilising the normal justification thesis from Raz, which offers an instrumentalist account of authority, Zagzebski offers two modified theses for the justification of moral authority:

**Justification Thesis 1 for the Authority of Moral Testimony (JAMT 1)**

The authority of another person’s moral testimony for me is justified by my conscientious judgement that I am more likely to form a true belief and avoid a false belief if I believe what the authority tells me than if I try to figure out what to believe myself.

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Justification Thesis 2 for the Authority of Moral Testimony (JAMT 2)

The authority of another person’s moral testimony for me is justified by my conscientious judgement that if I believe what the authority tells me, the result will survive my conscientious self-reflection better than if I try to figure out what to believe myself.  

An interesting feature of the second thesis, JAMT 2, is that it gets by without truth. According to JAMT 2, if one conscientiously believes that they will be epistemically better off by deferring to the intellectual moral authority in question than they would without deferring, then they ought to defer to the moral authority. Another feature of JAMT 2 which is appealing, specifically for an (1) internalist (2) focused on the epistemic robustness of arguments and (3) invulnerability to self-criticism, is the idea that one should defer when deference to the authority results in a position which better survives conscientious self-reflection. In highlighting the power and allure of the JAMT 2 thesis, Zagzebski states that:

Of course, some philosophers maintain that moral beliefs do not have truth value in any sense, and so JAMT 1 is inapplicable from their perspective. But fortunately we need not settle the matter because these considerations have no effect on JAMT 2, which does not rely upon the idea that there are moral truths that some people are better at discovering. The moral testimony of certain others preempts my own reasons for and against a belief if I reasonably believe that taking a belief on their testimony will survive my own conscientious self-reflection better than a belief I get on my own. All sides admit that self-reflection is a good thing whether or not it leads to the discovery of truth. A person who is conscientiously self-

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reflective reflects upon more than those items of her psyche that aim at truth. She reflects upon her moral beliefs along with all her other beliefs, and she reflects upon her emotions, attitudes, and choices. A mental state that survives conscientious self-reflection is one that remains after reflection without dissonance. This aim is not dependent upon the aim of getting truth. It follows that even if someone prefers to leave aside the issue of moral truth, the case for moral epistemic authority justified by JAMT 2 stands. \(^\text{32}\)

The focus of much recent epistemology, especially that presented by Zagzebski, has in one way or another been about intellectual trust in oneself. As a virtue epistemologist, Zagzebski uses the terms of harmony and dissonance. Zagzebski’s recent epistemology concerns coming to a state which survives conscientious self-reflection. For Zagzebski this harmony isn’t just about having a consistent or coherent set of beliefs. For Zagzebski harmony is about the absence of serious conflict between beliefs, emotions, desires and decisions. Zagzebski states that “[b]eliefs, emotions, desires, and decisions can conflict with one another. We experience conflict between our mental states as dissonance.” \(^\text{33}\)

By contrast Foley’s epistemology is more concerned with invulnerability to self-critique. In a way, the focus I have placed on robustness in my theory of intellectual expertise is similar, except in many cases more demanding. It has not been about just being beyond self-critique, but beyond fair epistemic critique more generally. In chapter 3, I stated that intellectual experts will have accessed or attained most of the relevant information reasonably available, and have epistemically rational beliefs in light of that information. While this may entail that


they are invulnerable to self-criticism, it will also typically entail being beyond fair epistemic critique more generally.\textsuperscript{34}

I highlight this point because it is not clear to me that if laypeople simply defer to intellectual experts, they are themselves necessarily beyond fair epistemic critique, even self-critique. Imagine for instance that a meteorologist claims it will rain tomorrow. Other things equal, blind deference to the forecaster, despite his status as an intellectual expert, is in many cases not warranted. In my case this is because I believe weather forecasters are often unreliable. I am epistemically justified in revising my beliefs towards the possibility of rain tomorrow—or an increased chance of rain—but not to the extent that I become certain of rain.\textsuperscript{35}

Likewise, adopting as guaranteed the latest thinking in climate science is surely a great folly. The domain is comparatively young and the science of the domain is both continually and routinely revised. The point of all this is that even if deference to what an expert believes does put me in a better epistemic position in terms of verisimilitude or indeed in the robustness of my opinions, I may be unlikely to enjoy the kind of reflective harmony that Zagzebski describes.\textsuperscript{36}

This is because insofar as my aim is not truth, but intellectual non-dissonance (or harmony), blind deference to intellectual experts may be largely unhelpful. Unhelpful because non-dissonance surely entails that I do not believe that any new thesis I adopt is likely to be incorrect. After all, inductively, as a

\textsuperscript{34} For some examples of unfair epistemic critique, see chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{35} There are certain cases where I may be warranted in revising my beliefs such that I believe we are guaranteed rain tomorrow: for example, in the case of a hurricane which has been tracked for days, is hours away from hitting, and is still on course to hit. Should the hurricane miss, it would be unfitting to criticise someone for believing it was going to rain.

\textsuperscript{36} Remember, this does not entail that my beliefs end up being true, probably true, or even robust. Something can be closer to true without being probably true or meaningfully close to the truth. Likewise, I take it that one position can be more robust than another, without actually being robust.
layperson I will often have excellent grounds for not outrightly accepting what an
intellectual expert tells me, even when I acknowledge that in fact an intellectual
expert. It does not matter that the meteorologist is epistemically justified in his or
her conclusion. What matters for me as a layperson is that meteorologists often
appear to get the weather wrong.

As such, once one holds a position of fallibilism, one may only come to enjoy
the harmony that Zagzebski describes once one accepts the approach of the
healthy scepticism that I advocate. Healthy scepticism is nothing like Cartesian
scepticism or philosophical doubt. It is simply a refusal to instantly accept or
completely revise one’s beliefs or be blindly led on the basis of an intellectual
expert’s epistemic authority. However this is not to say that one ought to never
revise their beliefs on epistemic authority. It is only to say that a wholesale revision
of one’s beliefs on the basis of epistemic authority will often not be compatible
with fallibilism. For example, in the case of climate science, the proper epistemic
path is to take some of claims which strike us as outrageous with a pinch of salt.
When it comes to meteorology, the proper epistemic path is to revise one’s beliefs
up or down in measured degrees, and typically not with wholesale revisions. When
a scientist claims that artificial intelligence will be occurring within a decade, the
proper epistemic path is to believe that the scientists are moving closer to a
functioning AI and not that AI is guaranteed within ten years. I call such this kind of
diminished acceptance of expert claims healthy scepticism.

9.6) Summary
This chapter has been a response concerning what to do in the face of apparent epistemic authority. I started by highlighting a problem delivered to political philosophers by Wolff. This problem concerns the tension between authority and autonomy. I started here because there has been a remarkable absence of literature on theoretical authorities in both epistemology and related disciplines: especially theoretical moral authorities.

Next I reviewed the literature on the base epistemic status that the positions of others should hold for us. The positions in the literature included epistemic egotism, epistemic egoism, and epistemic universalism. I adopted the position of epistemic universalism: I claimed that my justified belief that someone else genuinely believes a certain proposition P provides me with a prima facie reason for also believing that certain proposition P. I also noted that I hold two further theses: the thesis that apparent past reliability makes current positions more credible, and secondly the thesis that past apparent unreliability makes currently held positions less credible.

From this it is a short step to noting that blind deference to intellectual experts is epistemically unacceptable. Historically, the fact is that past experts have been predominantly unreliable at procuring meaningful truths. Consequently, I have argued that the correct epistemic path will often be to accept a diminished version of the beliefs that intellectual experts hold. Laypersons should hear what intellectual experts have to say, but they should not, by default, abandon their own reason in blind obedience. At least in my own case, blind deference to intellectual experts does not survive my own conscientious self-reflection. If I were to blindly follow intellectual experts, I would not be invulnerable to self-criticism.
Conclusion

My theory of intellectual expertise falls into the domain of social epistemology. This thesis falls within the domain of social epistemology because the topic of expertise is a socio-epistemological topic. I started this thesis by looking at some ways we might distinguish between epistemology and social epistemology. I suggested that attempts at a sharp distinction are unlikely to bear fruit. I further suggested that we should think of the distinction between epistemology and social epistemology as akin to the distinction between philosophy and political philosophy. In Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others, Foley argues that:

> Our belief systems are saturated with the opinions of others. In our childhoods, we acquire beliefs from parents, siblings, and teachers without much thought. These constitute the backdrop against which we form yet other beliefs, and, often enough, these latter beliefs are also the products of other people’s beliefs. We hear testimony from those we meet, read books and articles, listen to television and radio reports, and then form opinions on the basis of these sources of information. Moreover, our most fundamental concepts and assumptions, the material out of which our opinions are built, are not self-generated but rather are passed down to us from previous generations as part of our intellectual inheritance. We are not intellectual atoms, unaffected by one another. Our views are continuously and thoroughly shaped by others.¹

There are very few overstatements of how pervasive our intellectual cultures, standards and methods are, and on the extent to which they shape our

thinking. Experts are often referred to in arguments, be that in private households or in government or the workplace. This happens across a plethora of domains. How individuals should respond to the claims of experts is within the purview of a theory of intellectual expertise. The range of domains and the increased reliance upon experts is part of what justifies the broad scope of this thesis.

In the first chapter I analysed different conceptions of expertise, and described intellectual expertise as an account giving type of expertise. I based intellectual expertise on an idea that goes back to Plato. I said that intellectual expertise is a propositional kind of expertise. Intellectual experts are able to provide causal or teleological explanations within their specific domain.

‘Do such propositions have to be true in order to be constitutive of intellectual expertise?’ This was the central question I dealt with in chapter 2, and my answer was “no”. I placed emphasis on being able to provide a theory which is robust, and which can cope with radically different epistemic situations. Any robust theory must be able to accommodate for both expertise in domains which are epistemically impoverished, and in domains which are epistemically prosperous.

These considerations provided a road map for the kind of theory that is appropriate. Foley’s subjective foundationalism provided the general theoretical background for my theory. Subjective foundationalism, as a position, is one that emphasises the robustness of epistemic justification in one’s beliefs. It is a theory which gets by without recourse to veritistic assurances, and one that can allow for a multitude of unusual scenarios, like expert cavemen and time travelling scientists.

Yet the theory of intellectual expertise provides more than a flexible and robust response to unusual scenarios. It has significant explanatory power.
explanatory power is what the second half of the thesis demonstrates. Moral expertise has been a phenomenon requiring explanation since the times of Plato. Yet very few philosophers talk about intellectual authority, let alone moral authority. My theory of intellectual expertise, and its subjective foundationalist framework not only allows for an explanation of how moral expertise is possible, but also offers a way to diffuse the tension between the possibility of intellectual moral expertise and autonomy. In chapter 9 I outlined my position that due to a history of error, it will in many cases not be epistemically rational to outright defer to intellectual experts.

I have no doubt that one can dedicate an entire career to the study of expertise, and not say all that there is to say or capture about experts, or expertise. In light of this my theory is both very modest, and cautious. I have outlined certain conditions which I think are necessary for a particular type of expertise. This thesis has offered both an outline and a defence of those conditions.
Appendix

Teachability

Annas takes the Platonic position to be that expertise is transferable. That is to say that a student, other things equal, can be provided with causal or teleological accounts by an intellectual expert. The caveat ‘other things equal’ is important here. Any number of barriers to teaching could occur between the student and the intellectual expert at no fault of the either the experts or the students. A particularly dim student, or alternatively a language barrier could prevent the transference of propositional information. This however has no impact upon whether or not the intellectual expert in question is in fact an intellectual expert, or whether or not teaching is in principle possible. According to LaBarge, the Platonic position is that “...if some practice is an expertise, then it can be taught and learned, and any true expert should be able to teach his expertise.”¹ LaBarge substantiates this claim by quoting Meno 87c: “Or is it plain to anyone that men cannot be taught anything but knowledge?—I think so. But if Virtue is a kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught.—Of course.”²

My theory of intellectual expertise will adopt the conclusion that intellectual expertise is in principle teachable, regardless of domain. Note that non-intellectual types of expertise, perhaps something along the lines of Goldman’s skill expertise

or the Dreyfus conception of expertise, need not necessarily sign up to the teachability thesis. For instance, Dreyfus and Dreyfus state that:

When Feigenbaum suggests to an expert the rules expert seems to be using, he gets a Euthyphro-like response: “That’s true, but if you see enough patients, rocks, chip designs, instrument readings, you see that it isn’t true after all.” Feigenbaum comments with Socratic annoyance: “At this point, knowledge threatens to become ten thousand special cases.”

However intellectual expertise, since it is concerned with the possession of propositional accounts, will almost certainly entail the ability, even if not to teach, to relay those propositional accounts. Annas, continuing with her interpretation of the Platonic account of expertise, states that:

This demand for articulate explanation is what would be expected given the point about teachability; the teacher gets the expertise across to the apprentice first by example and then by explanation of what he been done. And what the expert teaches and explains is the understanding of what unifies the relevant subject matter.

This really gets at the link between teachability and explanation. LaBarge agrees with this assessment: “…an expert can offer an account of what he is doing and why it is the right thing to do. Hence in the Ion the expert charioteer can tell better than a non-expert what is said rightly about charioteering (Ion 538a-b)…

Likewise, that which distinguishes a mere knack from a genuine expertise is the

4 I understand the notion of teaching to typically require more than the simple relay of propositional information.
Gorgias, is the ‘rational understanding’ which the expert has of the nature of his subject matter, an understanding which enables him to explain what things happen as they do (Grg, 465a, 500e-501a).”

As such intellectual expertise should be teachable. This is because it involves the possession of propositional information, and not necessarily any particular non-propositional skill. As such, the inability to teach—or rather the inability to relay propositional information—is indicative of the non-possession of such information.

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It would be a surprising feat for any reasonably long essay in epistemology or social epistemology to get away with not mentioning the competing justification doctrines of internalism and externalism. Such a feat will not be achieved here. Debates about internalist and externalist accounts of justification have run rampant in modern epistemology. I do not intend to do much in the way of outlining exactly what the competing doctrines are, or alternatively to apply pressure to theories of either internalist or externalist persuasion. Instead, I will simply outline my reasons why I adopt an internalist framework of justification.

It should be obvious that using the framework of Foley’s subjective foundationalism that the theory of intellectual expertise I am providing falls into the internalist camp of justification. Again my reasons for adopting a framework of subjective foundationalism should be reasonably clear: it allows us to build a conception of epistemic rationality that can stand the test of time. It does this by allowing for epistemic rationality even in, comparatively speaking, strikingly desolate epistemic circumstances. It allows us to deal with intellectual revolutionaries and to not ride rough-shod over the methods, standards, and positions adopted by other societies. That is, my theory of intellectual expertise does about a good a job as can be done of respecting different eras, societies and their intellectual experts without adopting epistemic relativism. Each of these ticks is also a tick in the box of internalism. To a certain degree, they are veiled critiques of externalism. As such the problems outlined in chapter 2 concerning the relationship between intellectual expertise constituting beliefs and truth, can be
interpreted as a critique of externalism. Externalism is, according to Armstrong and Bonjour, the:

...view that what makes true belief knowledge is some relation (e.g., causal relation, nomological relation, or counterfactual relation) that holds between the belief state and the situation which makes the belief true... ¹²

The intuition is that, if the epistemic justification of a belief is analyzed in a way which entails a high objective probability of the beliefs being true, then the analysis is externalist. From the internalist’s perspective, a beliefs epistemic justification is a purely internal matter in that it is to be described without reference to any connection with the outside world. This is clearly expressed in Chisholm's view of internalism:

"According to this traditional conception of 'internal' epistemic justification, there is no logical connection between epistemic justification and the truth."³⁴

The absence of a logical connection between epistemic justification and truth is exactly what my theory of intellectual expertise requires in order to operate. A non-necessary relationship between epistemic justification and truth is what any sensible, enfranchising conception of intellectual expertise requires. As such, internalism is a natural, appropriate, and quite possibly necessary fit for my theory of intellectual expertise. For my theory of intellectual expertise to work, it needs to get by without veritistic assurances.

Idiosyncrasy

In his *Working Without A Net*, Foley warns about the danger of “...adopting a perspective that is so specific that we would not be interested in using it to evaluate the beliefs of very many people.”¹ Foley continues:

This is the danger of idiosyncrasy, and it is primarily a danger for egocentric and sociocentric interpretations. For example, suppose an account of rational belief implies that our beliefs are rational just if they satisfy condition C, and suppose that some random individual Smith, but almost no one else, thinks that beliefs with C are likely to be true. Then we can give an interpretation of the account in terms of an epistemic goal and the perspective of Smith. But unless there is reason to think that Smith is in a privileged position to determine what is likely to satisfy the epistemic goal, this interpretation won’t be interesting. We are not apt to be interested in using the perspective of Smith to evaluate the beliefs of anyone other than Smith himself. What would be the point?

So, if an egocentric or sociocentric account is to be interesting, it must somehow ensure that its proposed criteria have general applicability.²

There are three points to be made here: the first point is that in crafting my theory of intellectual expertise I have attempted to make sure that the criteria I have outlined for intellectual expertise are as broad as is reasonably possible. For example, the theory does not definitively rule out expert cavemen, nor does the theory specify that experts necessarily require training. After all, who can say what fruit further scientific research will provide for learning methods. I have in mind

here some such scenario as that imagined in the film ‘The Matrix’, where humans are uploaded with propositional information instantly ‘teaching’ them how to, for example, fly helicopters and perform martial arts. This is not to say that characteristically intellectual experts do not require training or learning. Given the contingent features of our world, of course they do. It is however appropriate to leave open the possibility for change in the future.

As such, the criteria I have outlined do have general applicability, and are not so specific as to be largely uninteresting; After all, my theory of intellectual expertise still may rule out the vast majority of humans that have ever lived from counting as intellectual experts.

However, when it comes to formal criteria, I cannot say whether or not this theory will stand up to aptly characterising experts ten thousand years from now. All I can do in outlining the criteria is to make such criteria suitably formal, modelled on avoiding past mistakes, and leaving open whatever it is the imagination can reasonably find room for. This I suspect is all we can reasonably demand from any theory, outside of its own internal consistency and reasonability in light of the information reasonably available.

The second point is that in constructing my theory of intellectual expertise, I believe that I have adopted the appropriate perspective given the failings of more traditional accounts of intellectual expertise, and in particular, given our current epistemic facticity: being mortal, non-omniscient, having limited resources, intellectual and otherwise, and not wanting to be entirely disenfranchised from intellectual expertise, while bearing in mind the promise of future epistemic endeavours.
The third point is that some may say that my theory of intellectual expertise is too inclusive or lax; one might claim that soothsayers and oracles could count as intellectual experts, when clearly not experts at all. Normally this objection might cite some extra criteria that the objector finds necessary for intellectual expertise, a necessary condition that I have not seen fit to mention. For instance, someone might suggest that intellectual experts are only in fact intellectual experts when their beliefs have been formed utilising a reliable repeatable process of investigation. As such, objectors may try and use such a criterion to rule out soothsayers and oracles, or anyone they regard as non-expert. There are three responses I intend to make to this claim: my first response is that my theory of intellectual expertise is not exhaustive. I state from the beginning that my theory of intellectual expertise is not intended to outline sufficient criteria for intellectual expertise, but only some necessary criteria.

My second response is that my theory of intellectual expertise is designed as a base from which to build; I have no objection to tacking onto my theory of intellectual expertise additional conditions which further specify what intellectual expertise requires, provided those conditions are appropriate, clear, and not too demanding. A requirement that was both too demanding and inappropriate was that intellectual expertise constituting beliefs are true. In this way my theory of intellectual expertise is remarkably lightweight. It is not too demanding.

Lastly one ought to be careful when it comes to balancing between inclusion and exclusion. Whether it be counting as an expert or not, rational or not, or whether or not one should have the right to vote, defining the principles which specify which camp P falls into is rarely a trivial task. That the theory is lightweight...
and non-exhaustive should help to limit controversy. Even if at the moment too many are included in the pool of intellectual experts, there is nothing stopping us, in principle, from further refinement. If the critique is that the theory errs on the side of caution, then it is a criticism I can live with. I would rather err on the side of caution than automatically defeat the theory by adding in criteria for intellectual expertise such as knowledge.
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